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S E R M O N S

PREACHED BEFORE THE
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD,

IN THE YEAR 1792,

AT THE LECTURE

Founded by the late Rev. JOHN BAMPTON, M. A.

CANON OF SALISBURY.

THE SECOND EDITION,

With Corrections and Additions.

TO WHICH ARE NOW SUBJOINED,
FOUR SERMONS

Preached before the University of Oxford,

In the Years 1791 and 1794.

BY JOHN EVELEIGH, D.D.

PROVOST OF ORIEL COLLEGE AND PREBENDARY OF
ROCHESTER./

OXFORD:

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M.DCC.XCIV.

TO THE
UNDERGRADUATES OF THE UNIVERSITIES OF
OXFORD AND CAMBRIDGE,
AND TO ALL THOSE OF EVERY DENOMINATION,
WHO HAVE NOT YET SATISFIED THEMSELVES
WITH RESPECT TO THEIR RELIGIOUS
AND INFINITELY MOST IMPORTANT CONCERNS
BY A REGULAR INQUIRY INTO THEM,
THESE SERMONS
ARE ADDRESSED ;
AND AN HABITUAL ATTENTION TO THE GREAT
TOPICS COMPENDIOUSLY DISCUSSED IN THEM
IS MOST EARNESTLY RECOMMENDED
BY
THEIR VERY FAITHFUL FRIEND
THE AUTHOR.

ADVERTISEMENT.

OF the following Sermons the eight first, which were preached at the Bampton-Lecture, contain a view of our Religion with regard to its substance, history, evidences, and the objections by which it is opposed; the two next deduce from Scripture the doctrine of the Trinity; the eleventh is designed to point out the general conduct which is required of us, in opposition to an unwarrantable dependence upon the divine mercy; and the last teaches us how to commence our Christian practice most properly and most advantageously with the worship of God.

In these Sermons the author trusts he has stated concisely and determinately the information,

mation, which is best calculated to excite a belief in the doctrines of Christianity, as it is professed in our truly Apostolical Church; and to establish the practice of it upon the most durable foundation: at least he can assert with confidence, that he has endeavoured faithfully to represent in them what he himself feels to be the ground-work and support of his own Religion.

What must follow from a rejection of Revelation and a total dependence upon human philosophy, the Almighty has been pleased to permit us to learn with certainty from the dreadful state, to which we have seen a neighbouring and powerful nation in a short time reduced. What are the consequences even of a partial adoption of such principles, the want, which we experience in our own conduct, of religious motives and religious trust too often unhappily evinces.

May God grant that these principles and these consequences may not increase among us! May a sober and regular attention to the
doctrines

ADVERTISEMENT. vii

doctrines and duties of Christianity, which are universally calculated to produce in us habits of contentment and of exertion in our different stations, and an animating confidence in that all-perfect Being who has placed us in them, secure for us the enjoyment of these invaluable attainments here, and that happiness which is to be their everlasting recompence hereafter !

S E R M O N I.

I PET. III. 15.

Be ready always to give an answer to every man, that asketh you a reason of the Hope that is in you.

IT is a distinguishing property of Christianity, that it not only admits of a rational inquiry into its truth, but also incites its professors to this inquiry in the most forcible manner, making it a part of their religious duty. We are commanded in the text to be always ready to give an answer to every man, that asketh us a reason of the Hope that is in us: or, in other words, we are commanded to satisfy ourselves universally of the truth of our Religion, so as to be prepared on all occasions to assign our reasons for believing in it.

Our Religion may be considered with regard to its substance, with regard to its history, with
B regard

regard, to the arguments by which it is confirmed, and with regard to the objections by which it is opposed. These four great topics include the principal circumstances which affect our Christian Faith : under them we have ample means of satisfying both ourselves and others concerning the Hope that is in us.

And many are the reasons, which ought to induce us, on occasions like the present, to prepare ourselves by a general discussion of these great topics to comply with the command of the text.

In an age when the real substance of our Religion is misrepresented by men of the most opposite characters and intentions ;—when the manner, in which it has been received and conveyed down to us, is traduced by the most insidious and unsupported insinuations ;—when the arguments in its defence are studiously disjoined from each other, and frittered away by successive detractions of many of their most convincing parts ;—and when the whole body of old objections against it is recalled, and enforced by new ones which are every day suggested by an adventurous and sceptical philosophy ;—in such an age it is conspicuously our duty to fortify our minds by a view of the information,

formation, comprehended under the general topics of Christian Theology which I have above enumerated.

Discourses also on such general topics may well be interspersed among others on the particular parts of our religious profession, which the founder of this Lecture has wisely marked out, as subjects of our discussion. Thus interspersed, they will conduce, on an extended scale, to similar good purposes with those reflections at large on any human science; which, in the progress of disquisitions on particular branches of it, suggest to us from time to time such conceptions of the whole, as are found to be essential to a full comprehension of the instructions which are communicated even on its most detached and minute divisions.

Such general information moreover cannot fail of being peculiarly serviceable to the younger part of my audience, for whose benefit this Institution was more immediately calculated. Since without it early improvements in religious science will be so desultory and imperfect, as to afford little reason to expect, either that Theological students will be furnished with that connected knowledge of the different parts of their Religion, which may qualify them in future life to teach others with advantage, or

(what ought never to be an object of less serious concern) that young and unexperienced minds will themselves be effectually guarded against that most extensive species of infidelity, which is founded on * ignorance of the general nature and circumstances of our Religion, and is constantly betraying itself by insignificant and impertinent objections against its truth, and by the senseless blasphemy which so often shocks the ears of good men in private conversation. Truth indeed has on all occasions so much force, that, when clearly proposed, it must command attention and respect : but the truths of Christianity are farther so admirably calculated to satisfy the hopes of the best men and to allay the penitential fears of the worst, that, wherever they are early and systematically understood, prejudice instead of exerting itself against them must co-operate with reason in their favour, and secure for them such influence on an uncorrupted heart as the opposition of ignorance will in vain attempt to destroy.

Since then a general discussion of the great

* “ From the several conversations, which it has been my chance to have with unbelievers, I have learned that ignorance of the nature of our Religion, and a disinclination to study both it and its evidences, are to be reckoned among the chief causes of infidelity.” Beattie’s Evidences, vol. i. p. 6.

topics,

topics, under which I have distributed the consideration of our Religion, and which are so comprehensive as to enable us to comply with the command of the text, is well suited to the present times,—is extensively useful at proper intervals amidst the particular subjects prescribed for this Lecture,—and is likely to be of peculiar service to the younger part of my audience;—I shall confine myself to it in the following discourses, and, without any apology for calling your attention to truths of which you must often before have heard the greater part, or any farther introduction, I shall propose it as my design to state compendiously, what Christianity is, what the manner in which it has been received and conveyed down to us, what the arguments by which its truth is defended, and what the objections with which it is assailed. Or, to propose my design with its particular comprehension and limitations, I shall endeavour,—First, to state in historical order the substance of our Religion, as it extends from the most remote circumstance any where revealed in Scripture to the publication of the Gospel after the ascension of Christ;—Secondly, to give a sketch of the history of our religion from this publication of the Gospel to the present times;

confining however this sketch, towards the conclusion, to the particular history of our own Church;—Thirdly, to state in a summary manner the arguments in general which are adducible in proof of the truth of Christianity;—And Fourthly, to point out the general sources of objection against it, and to shew that a forcible removal of these offences by divine interposition would be inconsistent with the doctrines themselves of Revelation; concluding the whole with a particular account of those objections which are advanced against Christianity from the pretensions of philosophy.

To begin then with stating in historical order the substance of our Religion, as it extends from the most remote circumstance any where revealed in Scripture to the publication of the Gospel after the ascension of Christ.

The declarations of Scripture, which form the substance of our Religion, ascend to the remotest subject from which it is possible that any information should commence. They inform us that from ^ceverlasting, from a duration which numbers have no powers to express and the mind of man no faculties to comprehend, is God: that he is a ^dSpirit, is

^c Ps. xc. 2.

^d John iv. 24.

pos-

* possessed of life in himself, and is infinite in perfection, but incomprehensible in his nature; and farther, that through his own free goodness he originally created, and continually preserves, whatever else besides himself has existence both in heaven and in earth.

The first intelligent beings, created by him, are sometimes in Scripture called Spirits from the refined constitution of their nature; at other times they are called angels from their ministration in the divine economy. Various are the ^f passages of holy writ, which assure us that they were created upright; while at the same time the fall of some among them most unhappily demonstrates that they were created also free agents and capable of sin. Why they should be permitted thus to fall, and why when fallen they should afterwards be permitted to tempt other creatures to involve themselves in a similar fate, are circumstances left among the secret things of God. Nor less unresolved by Revelation are the questions, “whether any

“Jehovah” and “I am,” the appropriate names of God in Scripture, are immediately derived from his inherent life. And by an oath, referring to this distinguishing property of the Godhead, the Almighty was often pleased to confirm his promises: “As I live saith the Lord.” Num. xiv. 21. Rom. xiv. 11.

^f John viii. 44. Jude vi.

part of matter were created at so early a period as the first intelligent creatures; and whether those creatures were clothed with material bodies?" Revelation, while it draws arguments for our instruction from the conduct, condition, and agency of superior beings, informs us indeed concerning particular circumstances of angelic history; but, to the utter disappointment of vain curiosity, it says nothing professedly with regard to this history.

Destined for human use, it confines itself to human concerns. After a full, but indefinite, assertion, that "in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth," it confines its professed information concerning the material creation to such circumstances, as particularly relate to man and the system which he inhabits: instructing us, that all the various objects, which we perceive and admire around us, were originally produced and have since been preserved by the all-perfect God; and also, that, among the productions of the material world, this all-perfect Being having formed man's body from the dust of the earth, was pleased in a distinguishing manner to breathe into his nostrils the breath of life. Thus ani-

* Gen. i. 1.

mated

mated with a spirit of heavenly extraction, man was said to be formed in the Image of God, was constituted sovereign of this lower world and was invested with the good things of it.

At the same time to prove his grateful obedience under these blessings, and to fit him (as ^b hath been inferred) for greater in another and eternal state, conditions of trial were imposed upon him. Like the angels, man was created upright and a free agent. By the wisdom of God obedience to a positive precept was enjoined him; and by the same wisdom the fallen angels were permitted to suggest temptations to the contrary. His own choice led him to disobedience, and to death, the predicted consequence. And this consequence, it might be feared, would contain under it not merely a privation of animal-life here, called temporal death; but (what in the regular course of things must be expected to follow from the guilt of free and corrupted agents) that privation also of the enjoyments of eternal life hereafter, which is called the second or eternal death.

But the universal progenitor of mankind having thus fallen through the temptation of

^b See Bishop Bull concerning the first covenant and the state of man before the fall, in the third volume of his Sermons and Discourses, 8vo. p. 1079, 1091, &c.

superior

superior and malicious beings, and having entailed upon his posterity a depraved and infirm nature ; man was not left doomed to these endless evils, which might thenceforth have been dreaded as the unavoidable punishment of his voluntary and unexpiated sin. His great Creator graciously and immediately interposed to provide a remedy for his fall. But so much did it cost to redeem his soul, that the remedy must astonish every rational creature. The ¹ eternal son of God (whose coexistence in nature with the Father forms part of the incomprehensibility of the Godhead) was in process of time to take upon him the nature of man. In that nature, united with his own in the same Person, he was to give mankind all the ² instruction necessary for them ; and by the meritorious sufferings of that nature, thus intimately connected with the divine, he was to make ¹ atonement for their sins, and to provide them with the most extensive means of escaping those dreadful consequences of their cor-

¹ Isaiah ix. 6. Zech. xiii. 7. Rom. viii. 32. Heb. ii. 16.

² Deut. xviii. 18. Even the Samaritans appear to have been fully convinced, that, when the Messiah came, " he should tell " them all things." John iv. 25.

¹ See, concerning the atonement made for us, Acts xx. 28. Rev. i. 5. Rom. iii. 23—26, and the whole of the 53d Chapter of Isaiah, and of the 9th and 10th Chapters of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

ruption

ruption which threatened to involve them in death eternal; with means, "as extensive as the influence of the first man's fall; "As by "one man's disobedience" many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one many were to "be made righteous:" "Christ was to taste death for every man:" "He was to give himself a ransom for all."

It is not however declared in Scripture to be necessary that all men should be made acquainted with the circumstances of this Redemption to qualify them for a participation of its blessings. Millions have partaken of corruption through Adam in different ages and degrees, without knowing the source of their corruption. And millions may partake of Redemption through Christ in equally different ages and degrees, notwithstanding their ignorance of him in this life. God, we are expressly told, is "the Saviour of all men;"

"God promised our first parents immediately upon the fall that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head: and by virtue of this Promise all truly good men were saved by Christ from the beginning."

Sherlock on Providence, p. 225, 226.

^a Rom. v. 19—"οἱ πολλοί" in both parts of this verse ought to be rendered "the many" or "mankind in general."

^o Heb. ii. 9.

^p 1 Tim. ii. 6.

^q See Butler's Analogy, note, p. 296, 8vo. edit.

^r 1 Tim. iv. 10.

though

though we are told at the same time, that he is so “especially of those that believe.”

These merciful designs indeed were not all revealed at once to any body of men : they are collected from different parts of Scripture and from the completion of the whole. The intimation of a redemption, which was given to the original transgressors, was sufficient to encourage hope ; and more appears not to have been intended by it. But, from the declaration that ‘ the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent’s head to the triumphant ascension of the Prince of life, the same merciful designs are pursued with an uniform direction to their great and final completion. Indeed we find on this occasion so uniform and wonderful a whole, that infidelity might be tempted to suspect some preconcerted plan of human contrivance ; were it not that many of the ‘inspired penmen appear not to have understood their own predictions on the subject, and much less to have had a connected knowledge of the different parts of the edifice which they were contributing to erect.

* Gen. iii. 15.

* Dan. xii. 8. 1 Pet. i. 10, 11, 12. 2 Pet. i. 20, 21. See on this subject Burgh’s Scripture Confutation, 2d edit. 8vo. p. 33, 34.

But,

But, whatever deliverance from future evil might be designed for man, no sooner had he forfeited his innocence, than he was reduced by the wisdom of his Creator to a state of "laborious activity, well calculated for sinful creatures. In this state he was left amidst toil and pain to ward off for a season temporal death; and by his virtue, here to be exercised in various trials, hereafter to be accepted through his great Redeemer, he was left to secure for himself an inheritance in life eternal.

The various parts of the material world, the various operations of the human mind, were thenceforth to suggest to him (according to the determination of his own free will) means of purification or of farther debasement. General "hopes of Redemption and general 'rules of conduct were given him, and without doubt general assistance of the Holy Spirit (that third Person in the incomprehensible Godhead, whose operations were from the beginning to be among the principle means provided for man's recovery) was " given also, to effect in honest minds an acceptable obedience. But the depravity of man's heart soon became destructive of his virtue. His descendants increased and

^u Gen. iii. 19.

^x Gen. iii. 15.

^y Gen. iv. 7.

^z Gen. vi. 3. Pf. li. 12.

their

their vices also increased. Neither the laws of conscience nor the more express commands of the Deity were effectual to restrain their headstrong passions. Every ^a imagination of their heart was evil: and violence overspread the face of the whole earth. To no effect was Enoch, who had walked with God, translated to the regions of heavenly bliss with a design to convince his brethren that the road to happiness in a better world was still open to religious obedience. To no effect was Noah raised up to be a preacher of righteousness, and a ^b time limited for the reformation or destruction of mankind. So great and so general was the vengeance which their profligacy called down upon them, that all the inhabitants of the earth, save eight persons, were swept away by an universal deluge.

But the promises of God concerning the Redemption of man were unalterable. Heaven and earth might pass away, but his word could not pass away.

Immediately after this fatal event the Almighty ^c smelled a sweet savour from that sacrifice, which had been instituted as a type of the great Redeemer, and determined that he

^a Gen. vi. 5.

^b Gen. vi. 3.

^c Gen. viii. 21.

would

would not any more smite every living thing : moreover he was graciously pleased to provide mankind with ^d new laws for their direction. To these laws we may refer both the foundation of the different Religions professed in the Heathen world, and the articles of Faith prescribed to the Jewish Profelytes of the Gate. But these laws were not the only means which appear to have been graciously used by the Almighty to hinder the future corruption of mankind. He immediately shortened the lives of Noah's descendants, with a merciful intention (as we may conclude) to render them more obedient and sooner to remove pernicious examples from the earth. And, on the presumptuous erection of the tower of Babel, the same great moral Governour interfered in a more conspicuous manner to restrain the licentiousness of those upon whom he had promised not to inflict a second general destruction : he distributed them into ^e separate nations by a confusion of tongues ; thus guarding against an uniformity of corruption among them, and providing in the ordinary course of his moral government means to punish their wickedness by the instrumentality of each other.

But, notwithstanding these divine injunc-

^d Gen. ix.

^e Gen. xi. 8.

tions

tions and interpositions, soon did the depravity of the human heart again widely extend its influence : soon did the descendants of Noah, from imperfect observations and groundless conjectures concerning the motions and natures of the ^f heavenly bodies, form for themselves, first perhaps (under the traditions which they might recollect, or under the influence of what their own ^g unworthiness might suggest, concerning the necessity of a mediator) a race of tutelar gods or intercessors with the most High ; and afterwards, as their ^h corruptions increased, ⁱ Gods of a supreme and independent nature. That mankind therefore,

^f Of what sort the original corruption of divine worship was, we may infer from Acts vii. 42, 43.

^g Secker's Lectures, 8vo. vol. ii. p. 145.

^h We shall easily conceive to what degree religious traditions may be corrupted from the following remarkable fact ;
 “ Some Saxon Monks, who had formerly introduced the Gospel into Rugia, dedicated a Church there to their patron
 “ St. Vitus. The inhabitants afterwards relapsed into Pagan-
 “ ism, forgot the true God, and, when they were converted
 “ again about the year 1170, they were found to be given up
 “ to the worship of the idol Suantovit which they had derived
 “ from “ Saint Vitus.”

Jortin's Remarks on Eccl. Hist. vol. v. p. 232. 1st edit.

ⁱ What Mr. Hume asserts in his natural history of Religion, to prove that Polytheism was the primary Religion of mankind, has the same kind of foundation with those political systems, which admit of no original communications from the Deity and derive all government from the free and uninfluenced choice of the People.

forgetful

forgetful of the commands enjoined to Noah and his posterity, might not be involved a second time in an universal alienation from the living God; and also that they might not be unprepared to receive the promised Redemption; it pleased the Almighty to select ^k one from the faithful then left, to impart to him a particular knowledge of his duty, and by confining the Redeemer to his ^l descendants to interest them more immediately in the preservation and publication of those prophecies concerning this great Personage which were to be entrusted to human care: that the service of the living God might not be left without advocates among men, some true worshippers were at different times, by traditions derived from them and miracles wrought among them, to convey ^m instruction to the idolatrous Heathen and occasionally to dispel their gross darkness even before the day-spring from on high should visit them; and that there might be some guardians worthy to be entrusted with the sacred ⁿ oracles, some country fitted to receive the ^o sun of righteousness, it was or-

^k Gen. xii. 1, 2, 3.

^l Gen. xxii. 18.

^m See Jenkin's Reasonableness of the Christian Religion, vol. i. p. 73, &c.

ⁿ Rom. iii. 2.

^o Mal. iv. 2.

dained that there should be "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation."

Such were the important designs of the Jewish dispensation.

The promises made to the posterity of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob, the miracles wrought in their preservation and increase, and their deliverance from Egyptian bondage, are every where urged as arguments against idolatry and types of universal Redemption. After this deliverance, as if occasional interpositions were inadequate to his gracious purposes, the Deity vouchsafed by a continuation of miracles to take immediately upon himself their temporal government. Nor can the human mind conceive a scene more awful, or more impressive of religious obedience, than that which ushered in the

^P 1 Pet. ii. 9. Exod. xix. 5, 6.

^q The term "Jew," which is the appropriate denomination of the descendants of Judah, soon included under it the Benjamites, who joined themselves to the tribe of Judah on the revolt of the other ten tribes from the House of David. After the Babylonish captivity, when many individuals of these ten tribes returned with the men of Judah and Benjamin to rebuild Jerusalem, the same term was made to include them also. From hence not only all the Israelites of future times have been called Jews; but farther all the descendants of Jacob are so called by us at present from the very beginning of their history; and we speak even of their original dispensation, as the Jewish dispensation.

laws

laws and ordinances of this new Kingdom. While the visible interposition of the divine Majesty conferred on it a solemnity and dignity, which no ' language but that of Inspiration can describe; the ' public display of this wonderful condescension was calculated to preclude all possible suspicion of imposture and to convey the most durable instruction to posterity. At the same time the precaution also, with which the divine commands were delivered, served to prove their great and lasting importance. For, to prevent as much as possible that intermixture of human error which might arise from the contracted duration of men's lives, the Mosaical instructions were not, like former Revelations, left to the conveyance of tradition, but ' written and engraven by the finger of God. And well are they worthy of our attention on account of their excellent morality; but particularly ought we to observe the manner, in which they are calculated to consecrate a peculiar people to the service of the true God by the prohibition of intercourse and intermarriage

* Some of the most beautiful and sublime passages of sacred poetry consist of allusions to the wonderful scene which was exhibited on mount Sinai. See Lowth de sacra Poesi Heb. 3d edit. p. 113.

* See Exod. xix. —.

* Exod. xxxi. 18. Ib. xxxii. 16.

between them and their idolatrous neighbours (that fatal cause of the corruption of the old world when the " sons of God went in to the daughters of men), and by numberless precepts, which were designed to create in them a settled abhorrence of the " advocates for Heathen superstition and which to some refined moralists favour too little of universal charity. How effectually these injunctions operated, under the immediate appointment of the Almighty, to form the Jews into a separate body from the rest of mankind, is exceedingly remarkable. To this very day, like the well-cemented ruins of some old fortrefs,

▪ Gen. vi. 2.

▪ That the Jewish laws are singularly favourable to strangers, as such, is abundantly evident from Lev. xix. 34.—xxiii. 22.—xxiv. 22.—xxv. 35.—Num. xv. 15, 16.—Deut. i. 16.—x. 17—19.—xxiv. 14—17.—xxvii. 19. Had Mr. Gibbon been acquainted with these and many other such parts of the Jewish law, he would not have asserted in the most unqualified manner, on account of some punishments said to be inflicted, in the old Testament the reasons of which he perhaps did not understand, " that the moral attributes of Jehovah may not easily " be reconciled with the standard of *human* virtue." History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, vol. v. p. 202. But, whatever such men may presume to assert, we know, on the authority of one wiser and better acquainted with the subject, " that no nation had statutes and judgments so righteous " as all the law which was set before the Jews." Deut. iv. 8. And, whatever might have happened on particular occasions and for particular reasons, we are assured in general with regard to the princes of the house of Israel from the confession of their enemies that they were merciful kings. See 1 Kings xx. 31.
they

they exhibit proofs of the most durable texture; and, however their original use be superseded, adhere together with undiminished force. Nor did it contribute in an ordinary degree to promote the great ends of the Mosaic dispensation, that the rewards and punishments of it were immediately distributed; and that the Jews were left to discover, by ² other means, the doctrine of a future state. For how could this people be so strongly guarded against the temptations to idolatry which were ever soliciting their senses from present objects, as by the contrary assurance of present gratifications? Or by what other so effectual a method could they be made to look forward with interested confidence to that great Lawgiver, whom Moses himself ¹ commands them to obey in language the most explicit and solemn? Under such influence if the Law did not, by its spiritual design, as a ² school-master bring them to Christ; their

¹ With regard to the doctrine of a future state both the Jews and the Gentiles appear universally to have derived traditional information on this important subject from some original Revelation, communicated to mankind in the early ages of their history: that however of the Jews continued very much more pure in consequence of the instruction, conveyed to them by the descriptions of God and the promises of Redemption which are every where found in their Scriptures.

¹ Deut. xviii. 15—19.

² Gal. iii. 24.

C 3

zealous

zealous attention from temporal motives to every particular relative to him would make them instruments of universal salvation. Exclusively indeed of such considerations, had the Mosaical covenant proposed to its partakers future and eternal rewards without full information that these were not to be obtained through works of the law, unless sanctified by Faith in their promised Redeemer; it would apparently have superseded the necessity of this Redeemer. And since the Divine Mercy did not think fit to propose explicitly the conditions of our eternal life before the great sacrifice for sin had been actually offered; we cannot enough admire the wisdom, by which the necessary temporality of the Mosaical sanctions was employed to prepare the way for a better covenant.

At the same time that the promised descent of the Redeemer might not lose of its influence by being common to too many, it is very remarkable how it is limited: first to ^a Isaac, then to ^b Jacob, then to ^c Judah, and afterwards to ^d David and his posterity. Nor was

^a Gen. xxi. 12. Heb. xi. 18.

^b Gen. xxxv. 12. Mal. i. 2, 3.

^c Gen. xlix. 12. ^d Acts ii. 30.

it thus limited without some concomitant and immediate token of divine favour. Each of these patriarchs was soon distinguished by his riches and power.

Care having been thus taken to preserve in some part of the world the knowledge of the true God, and to prepare a sacred repository for the prophecies, which were not only to authenticate the Redeemer on his arrival, but also to prepare mankind for his reception; we may every where find these reasons of the Jewish dispensation insisted upon and enforced. It was not for their own virtue that the Jews were made particular objects of divine care; but because Jehovah loved their forefathers, who amidst an idolatrous generation had remained uncorrupted; and for the glory of his name, to be displayed in the universal Redemption of mankind. * This their great Lawgiver and their prophets fully declare, while they upbraid the Jews with unworthiness of divine favour. And though the history of this people for many ages immediately after the promulgation of their law is one continued relation of perverse obstinacy and diso-

* Compare Deut. ix. 7. with Deut. x. 15, 16. And see the 48th and 49th chapters of Isaiah.

bedience; yet the merciful Providence of God abandoned not these rebellious children, but at different times raised up holy prophets to reprove them and almost to force them back to their duty. So much was the universal and eternal interest of mankind concerned in the preservation of that seed, through which all the nations of the earth were to be blessed! And while by alluring promises every day fulfilled before their eyes, by grievous threats, and even by the severest temporal punishments, they were reduced at length to some partial obedience; the great work of man's salvation was accelerated. Those prophets, who denounced through the Holy Spirit the most oppressive bondage on this rebellious nation, foretold also with encreasing clearness through the same Spirit the future deliverance of mankind and the eternal blessings of Messiah's Kingdom. Nor is the precision, with which they pointed out the great Saviour, unworthy of the most particular attention. Almost every circumstance relative to him was marked out with minute detail. His miraculous^e conception; his birth,

^f The Jews were never guilty of idolatry after the Babylonish captivity.

^e If. vii. 14.

with

with the particular ^h time and ⁱ place of it; the ^k obscurity of his outward appearance; his ^l fasting during forty days; the ^m spotless purity of his life; the ⁿ greatness of his miracles; his ^o triumphant, though humble, entry into Jerusalem; the ^p betraying of him for thirty pieces of silver; his execution with common ^q malefactors; his ^r patience under all manner of insult and torture previous to his death, while his ^s back was given to the smiters, his ^t hands and feet were pierced, and the parching thirst occasioned by his agony could procure no other assuaging potion than ^u vinegar mingled with gall; his making ^v of his grave ^w with the rich; his ^x resurrection on the third day; his ^y triumphant ascension; and the ^z flocking together of the Gentiles to his ensign; all these and many more circumstances, relative to him, were prefigured and foretold with a precision eminently characteristic of Omniscience. Perverse and invincible must the scepticism be, which remains

^h Dan. ix. 25.^k Is. liii. 2.^m Is. liii. 9, 11.^p Zech. xi. 12.^q Is. l. 6.^r Is. liii. 9.^s Is. lx. 3, &c.ⁱ Mic. v. 2.^l Prefigured by Moses and Elijah.ⁿ Is. xxxv. 5, 6.^q Is. liii. 12.^t Ps. xxii. 16.^x Jonah ii. 10^o Zech. ix. 9.^r Is. liii. 7.^u Is. lxix. 21.^v Ps. xxiv.

unin-

uninfluenced by it in any situation. No wonder therefore that it should have left without the possibility of excuse that obstinacy which refused assent to this prophetic evidence, when it was afterwards drawn together and presented by the Apostles to the Jewish nation, with a display of miracles correspondent to those of the great Redeemer himself, and with a force peculiar to the accomplishment of writings which had long been regarded by this nation as their distinguishing glory. But, like the ^a infidel lord who would not believe the Prophet Elisha's gracious prediction, they were to see the great promises of God fulfilled before their eyes and not to taste of them. Indeed, to verify incontrovertibly the reasons here assigned for the Jewish dispensation, and to preclude all supposition of predilection in the Almighty for the posterity of Jacob his ^b beloved for their own sake exclusively, ten of the twelve tribes of Israel, rendered no longer useful in the grand scheme of man's salvation by their obstinate idolatry and the limitation of the Messiah to the tribe of Judah, were many hundred years before his coming dispersed and removed from the peculiar protection of the

^a 2 Kings vii. 2.

^b Mal. i. 2.

Almighty;

Almighty; a punishment, which was in a conspicuous degree to await their brethren also, and which was only deferred till the great purposes of their separate and national establishment had been fully accomplished.

In the mean time the other nations of the earth were exercising, under various circumstances and in various degrees, that reason, which, however perversely applied, was given them to promote their own * happiness and the glory of their Creator. After their dispersion at Babel they formed themselves into societies, established ^d empires, cultivated science. But they * corrupted the Religion, given to Noah and his descendants, by Polytheism (as hath been declared) and by idolatry: they corrupted the promises and commands of God,

* “*Parvulos nobis dedit igniculos, quos celeriter malis moribus opinionibusque depravatis sic restringimus, ut nusquam naturæ lumen appareat. Sunt enim ingeniis nostris semina innata virtutum, quæ si adolescere liceret, ipsa nos ad beatam vitam natura perduceret.*” Cic. Tusc. Quæst. L. 3. C. 1.

^d Shuckford's Connections, vol. ii. p. 67. 2d edit.

* When Cicero describes the Causes of the corruption of mankind, he mentions the poets first and with greater propriety than he was himself aware of; since these contributed, by debasing divine traditions, to the general corruption very much more than could ever be known to the Roman philosopher. Tusc. Quæst. L. 3. C. 2.

involved

involved themselves in the punishment of a^f reprobate mind, and became ignorant of the true nature both of God and themselves. Their temporal success however puffed up their vain imaginations, often tempted the true worshippers to desert the living Jehovah, often called down denunciations and inflictions of divine vengeance upon the Gentile no less than upon the Jewish idolater. Human reason indeed did not succeed even thus far every where. In countries distantly removed from the seat of Revelation, by degrees the most debasing superstition usurped the place of Religion, the powers of the mind were left uncultivated, and the foolish heart of man appears to have been darkened both with regard to things temporal and eternal. But though God was pleased so far to wink at these times of ignorance, as not immediately to interfere either to extirpate or to reform the offenders; and though he caused his sun alike to shine upon the just and the unjust; yet no part of mankind was left unregarded by their great moral Governour: they were all universally going on with that state of probation, to which they had been reduced by

^f Rom. i. 28.

their

their original parents, or rather to which they had been restored by the mercy of God; and according to their conduct in this probation they were, under the Atonement of their great Redeemer, to receive their portion in another life. The Gentiles, having a power (as Revelation ^a sufficiently declares) to do by nature the things contained in the Law, might render themselves fit objects of divine favour by living agreeably to its injunctions: and they who sinned without Law were to perish without Law, not less ^b assuredly, than they who sinned in the Law were to be judged by the Law; ' those, who had no other written Law given them, having a Law written in their hearts, their consciences bearing them witness.

The Gentiles however, instead of striving through the divine mercy to extricate themselves from the curse of sin, had not only proved unworthy of the food and gladness with which their hearts were filled, and consequently much more unworthy of the eternal blessings to which they might have aspired;

^a See Rom. i. 19, 20. Ibid. ii. 14. Besides, we must here recollect, what has above been declared, that some assistance of the holy Spirit appears from the beginning to have been extended universally to the infirmities of human nature. See Gen. vi. 3. &c.

^b Rom. ii. 12.

^c Rom. ii. 14, 15.

but

but the Jews also (as we have seen) could with difficulty be restrained within bounds of religious duty. Even when this chosen people had ceased after the Babylonish captivity to profane their Religion by idolatry, they made it, as far as in them lay, of none ^k effect by their traditions. But the perverseness of the Gentiles and Jews had evinced the universal and inveterate depravity of human nature; and ^l thus had itself been preparing the way for the great Redeemer. Conducively to the same important end, the Gentiles had besides demonstrated the insufficiency of man's most cultivated reason to retrace, after long obliteration, the great duties of a religious life: and the maxims, occasionally inculcated or ostentatiously displayed by their philosophers, had illustrated the admirable fitness of such a morality as Christianity was to enjoin. The Jews also had preserved and made ^m known the prophecies which were to authenticate the Redeemer; and, by abhorrence of Idolatry after their return from Babylon, had been brought to recommend the worship of the invisible God.

^k Mark vii. 13.

^l Rom. iii. 9, 25.

^m These prophecies were known not only to all the Jews, but also to the Heathens, as it appears from Virgil and other Heathen writers.

Prepa-

Preparation had by these and other means been made for the Redemption and perfect instruction of mankind. Preparation had been made: and the fulness of time came. After the Jewish Scriptures had been closed for an awful period of nearly four hundred years, the birth of the great Saviour was announced by a multitude of the heavenly host. And well might the important message be declared to contain tidings of great joy to all people.

From the first fall of mankind sin had reigned in their mortal bodies; and the wages of it had been continued misery. Of this the Heathen philosophers were so far sensible, that they recommended perfect ^a virtue, as the only solid foundation of happiness. But they could ^{*} no where find this virtue, and were at a loss where to find their happy man. By requisitions, better suited to human infirmity, Revelation, from the first introduction of human misery, had been preparing a renovation of happiness for mankind: obscurely and typically often in the beginning; but not so, when Christianity was finally proposed as the com-

^a See the fifth book of Cicero's Tusculan Questions.

^{*} "Nemo sine vitiis nascitur" is a truth universally admitted by the wisest Heathens.

pletion

pletion of all former revelations. The Christian covenant began not with the most distant requisition of Stoical apathy or unattainable perfection. The voice of him, that cried in the wilderness, required no such qualifications in mankind. It ^p addressed itself to them, as sinful creatures, and exhorted them to repent. With the same exhortation the Redeemer also himself ^q entered upon the publication of his Religion; and the same was the introductory doctrine of his ^r disciples and destined successors. The first step towards the restoration of mankind to divine favour was repeatedly pointed out in an humble confession of their own unworthiness. Nor were the subsequent means of counteracting the bad effects of their depravity left either to be discovered or to be regulated by themselves. By ^s instructions, delivered in his own and his Father's ^t name from his mouth who spake as never man spake, and by his all-perfect example and ^u atonement

^p Mat. iii. 2.

^q Mat. iv. 17. Mark i. 15.

^r Mark vi. 12.

^s See more concerning this instruction in the fifth Sermon, where it is urged, under the internal evidences of our Religion, as an argument in its favour.

^t Mat. 5th, 6th and 7th Chapters, John v. 43. Ib. vii. 16, 17.

^u 2 Cor. v. 21. See also the parts of Scripture above referred to concerning this Atonement.

who

who was tempted in all points like as we are yet without sin, such provision was made for our assistance and acceptance in the performance of our duty towards God, our neighbour, and ourselves, as at once is calculated to restore our nature to its proper perfection and to ⁱⁿ proportion to our abilities the obedience required from us. During the ministry upon earth of this wonderful Personage, he was engaged either in thus instructing his followers with regard to their duty, and in providing the merciful means of their present and future happiness; or in evincing, by displays of the most astonishing miracles and by completions of prophecies, the reality of his pretensions and divine mission. During his ministry upon earth, whatsoever had been written in the Law, or in the Prophets, concerning the office and character, concerning the birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of the great Redeemer received in Jesus of Nazareth its perfect accomplishment. From the moment that the glorified Jesus, having arisen from the dead, was invested with his office of Intercessor for mankind and was openly announced as their future judge, their promised Redemption

ⁱⁿ Matt. xxv. 14—23.

D

was

was completed. A new covenant between God and man commenced: a covenant, into which all ^{*} nations were to be admitted by Baptism; and in which they were to be supported and perfected by solemn [†] commemorations of the great sacrifice which had been offered for their sins: a covenant, which, though comprehensive in its efficacy of the first man and [‡] all his descendants, disclosed itself with various degrees of light; and shone not forth in all its splendour before the ascension of its great mediator.

From that time God was pleased explicitly to ^{*} inform mankind concerning their state of trial in this life, and concerning the conditions of their future judgment: that, though they must here remain subject to temptation from the world, the flesh, and the Devil, and at length to death itself; they were provided with abundant means of escaping that misery hereafter, which is to be the certain and dreadful consequence of wilful perseverance in Irreligion and which is called death eternal: that,

^{*} Matt. xxviii. 19.

[†] Luke xxii. 19.

[‡] See concerning the universality of Christianity the passages of Scripture above cited, and also what is said on the subject in the sixth Sermon.

[§] This information may be collected from the universal tenor of the Apostolical writings.

through

through the infinite atonement made for them by his blessed Son, he would assist their infirmities by the preventing and continued influence of his Holy Spirit, would pardon their sins, and reward them with peace here and eternal glory hereafter ; provided, on their part, that they would embrace these his gracious offers with that determined Faith in the doctrines revealed by him, which proceeds, under the evidences of their truth, from humble reliance on his infinite perfections ; and with that obedience to his precepts, which demonstrates a sincere and universal desire to obey them. The Apostles and others were appointed to announce this covenant : while the persons to whom it was announced, being in possession of the free will, which their original parents, and their more immediate ancestors the Gentiles and Jews, so obstinately perverted, had full power to accept or reject it. It was foretold that preachers should continue in future ages to propose the same terms, and that mankind should continue to be invested with the same powers of acceptance or rejection. But in Christianity every offer of divine mercy was to be completed. No farther covenant was ever to be proposed ; nor this withdrawn. If even an angel from heaven were to teach any other doctrine, he

was to be ^b accursed; while at the same time all the ^c scoffs of the latter days and the ^d gates of hell itself were never to prevail to the eradication of this holy Religion.

Such is the substance of our Religion as it extends from the most remote circumstance any where revealed in Scripture to the publication of the Gospel after the ascension of Christ. Such therefore was our Religion at the time of its original completion: and such also it continues to be to this day; the grand scheme of man's restoration to divine favour having been fully perfected by the acceptance of the atonement made for him by his great Redeemer, and admitting in itself of no variation from subsequent circumstances of time or place.

As to the display of miraculous powers with which our religion was afterwards published, and the infallible manner, in which it was so recorded for the permanent use of mankind, as to enable them with certainty to collect for themselves in every age those conditions of their future and eternal happiness which have been above stated; these are circumstances of which the relation will fall under the next head.

^b Gal. i. 8. ^c 2 Pet. iii. 3. ^d Matt. xvi. 18.

S E R M O N I I.

I PET. III. 15.

Be ready always to give an answer to every man, that asketh you a reason of the Hope that is in you.

HAVING stated in historical order the substance of our Religion, as it extends from the most remote circumstance any where revealed in Scripture to the publication of the Gospel after the ascension of Christ, I am now to give a sketch of the history of our Religion from this publication of the Gospel to the present times ; and thus to point out the answer, which we may give concerning the hope that is in us, as far as relates to the manner in which our Religion has been received and conveyed through successive ages down to our own.

D 3

This

This head is so extensive, that, compendiously discussed, it will furnish matter for three Discourses: the first will carry us from the publication of our religion after the ascension of Christ to the establishment of it by Constantine; the second from its establishment by Constantine to the commencement of the Reformation; and the third from the commencement of the Reformation to the present times, or (as I have limited this part of my subject) to the present state of our own Church.

To begin then with the first of these periods. The Apostles, who were commissioned by our blessed Saviour to publish his Religion, were men destitute of worldly advantages; but they were men, who had been ^c with him from the beginning, and, together with their great persecutor^t and future associate, were distinguished by an ingenuousness of mind, which in all ages has been required as a necessary preparation for the reception of divine Truth. St. Peter's repentance, St. Thomas's confession, and St. Paul's conversion, are eminent displays of this disposition.

At first the Apostles, like their great Master, confined their instruction to that nation

^c John. xv. 27.

which

which had hitherto been the more immediate object of divine Revelation. They soon however learned, that the God, whom they preached, was not the God of the Jews only, but of the Gentiles also. The miraculous effusion of the Holy Spirit by degrees opened and enlarged their understanding on this important subject; and his various gifts raised their feeble powers to the ability of executing the task of preaching the Gospel to the whole world, to which they had been commissioned by their great Master. It was impossible that our Saviour should himself in his human capacity be every where present before his sufferings to preach his Gospel: and, as the Jewish nation had been particularly calculated for his reception and Judæa was to be the theatre of his mighty works, it was necessary that the Gospel should be first preached unto the Jews. But from the commencement of this salvation the Gentiles were not unapprised that they also were to partake of its blessings. No sooner did the Saviour of mankind appear in the flesh, than the wise men of the East were conducted by the leading of a star to the habitation of this king of Israel. And no

^f Acts xiii. 46.

D 4

sooner

sooner again was the salvation of mankind effected, than the partition between the Jewish and Gentile worshippers was removed: the veil of the temple was immediately rent in twain from the top to the bottom. St. Paul also was soon after called to be the Apostle of the Gentiles; Cornelius's prayer was heard: the Holy Ghost fell upon him: and that Gospel, which had hitherto been the peculiar glory of Israel, became a light to lighten the Gentiles.

In the Acts of the Apostles we have a concise account of the incessant ardour, with which the preachers of Christianity went on, after the communication of the Gospel to the Gentiles, to make known to the whole world the glad tidings of their ministry. Their zeal carried them by different routes into distant countries: supernatural powers every where raised for them the attention of mankind: and the sanctity of their lives and doctrines improved this attention to the advantage of their new Religion. How far they actually extended their progress has been the subject of curious and often of sceptical inquiry. It is perhaps impossible, it certainly is unnecessary, to determine this question in the present age. The natural blessings of any country are effaced

faced by indolence or disaster ; and both the advantage and remembrance of religious improvements are done away by the neglect or the perversion of religious obligations. But, notwithstanding every insinuation to the contrary, we may rest assured from good authority that the first preachers of Christianity not only ^a visited all the distinguished countries of the old world ; but also that their zeal carried them ^b beyond the regions, into which either ambition or avarice had in those days furnished means of extending the geographical discoveries of Roman science. The prediction was fully accomplished, which declared that before the destruction of Jerusalem ^c “ the Gospel should be preached in all “ the world for a witness to all nations ;” and St. Paul had the joyful opportunity of assuring the Colossians that “ ^d the Gospel was

^a See Stillingfleet's Orig. Britan. p. 37, 38.

^b Tertullian says “ Britannorum inaccessa Romanis loca, Christo vero subdita ”—adversus Judæos, c. 7.

Eusebius also says concerning our Saviour's original disciples, “ Κηρύττειν δι (αυτους) εις παντας το του Ιησου ονομα, και τας παραδοξους πραξεις αυτου κατα τι αγρος και κατα πολιν διδασκειν, και τω μεν αυτων την Ρωμαινι αρχην και αυτην τε την βασιλικωτατην πολιν κηρυττειν, τω δι την Περσιν, τω δι την Αρμενιαν, ιτερους δι το Παρθον εθνος, και αυ παλι το Σκυθον, τινας δι ηδη και εκ' αυτα της οικουμένης ελθον τα ακρα, επι τι την Ινδον φθασαι χωραι, και ιτερους υπερ του ρωμαιου παρελθον επι τας καλημινας Βρετανικας ηθους.”

Euseb. Demonst. Evangel. l. iii. p. 112. edit. Par. 1628.

^c Matt. xxiv. 14.

^d Col. i. 6.

“ come

“come unto them, as it was also in all the
“¹ world.”

The Apostles in their first preaching of Christianity contented themselves with delivering by oral communication the great and simple truths of their Religion. The extent of their personal industry was the extent also of their instruction. This industry however was indefatigable: and its success was soon followed by other means both of disseminating and supporting the truth. Within a ^m short time after the descent of the Holy Spirit it pleased the

¹ See Origen against Celsus, l. i. c. 7. and l. ii. c. 13. Paris 1733.

Correspondently with this propagation of our Religion Arnobius says, “Quod si falsa, ut dicitis, historia illa rerum est, unde
“tam brevi tempore mundus ista religione completus?”

Adv. Gentes, l. i. p. 33. Lugd. Bat. 1651.

^m “Postea enim quam surrexit Dominus noster a mortuis et
“induti sunt supervenientis Spiritus Sancti virtutem ex alto, de
“omnibus adimpleti sunt et habuerunt perfectam agnitionem,
“et exierunt in fines terræ ea quæ a Deo nobis bona sunt evan-
“gelizantes, et cœlestem pacem hominibus annunciantes, qui
“quidem omnes pariter et singuli eorum habentes Evangelium
“Dei. Ita Matthæus scripturam edidit Evangelii,” &c.

Irenæus adv. Hær. l. iii. c. 1. edit. Massuet.

I might mention different opinions concerning the time when the Gospels were written: but, for the sake of precision, I shall mention that of Townson only, who is among the latest approved writers on the subject. He supposes, with Cosmas of Alexandria, that St. Matthew wrote his Gospel about the time of the persecution upon St. Stephen's death; Discourses on the Gospels, p. 25. And again he says p. 113. “we may rest secure
“that St. Matthew's Gospel was written by the year 37.”

divine

divine Providence that St. Matthew should publish an account of the life, doctrines, death, resurrection, and ascension of his great Master. Thus was a foundation laid for similar and supplemental writings, which ensued in their respective seasons. About twenty years after the publication of St. Matthew's Gospel, ^a St. Mark, the disciple of St. Peter, abridged (as it appears) in many instances the Gospel of St. Matthew, and by the addition of some particular circumstances adapted it more fully to general use. A farther interval of a few ^{*} years succeeded, before St. Luke, the beloved companion of St. Paul, undertook to write on the same subject and finished his Gospel to the particular advantage of the Gentile world; ^b putting into it the doctrines preached by St. Paul. In the mean time the more distinguished among the Apostles were labouring incessantly in the great work of converting mankind: and being ordained, like the Evangelists, to teach men of every country and every age, they were

^a Townson says that St. Mark's Gospel was written about the end of the year 56, or of the year 60. Discourses, p. 168.

^b With regard to St. Luke's Gospel, Townson says only that it was written after St. Matthew's and St. Mark's, and that St. Luke had seen those Gospels, p. 200.

^c See Irenæus *advers. Hær.* l. iii. c. 14. See also Bp. Horsley's Tracts, 8vo. 1789. p. 326.

per-

perpetuating in common with them the various instructions by which they were to build up the Church of God. In the Acts of the Apostles, written by St. Luke, and in the various Epistles still extant, and written by St. Paul, St. James, St. Peter, St. Jude, and St. John, we may admire the^a contempt of danger with which these Holy men attested the truth of what they had heard and seen; we may admire the zeal with which they went on to improve their disciples; we may admire also the Mercy of God, who has furnished posterity through their means with the most perfect instructions in righteousness. But there is one circumstance, which regards the writings of the New Testament and which particularly calls for our grateful admiration. It was appointed by the Providence of God that these writings should be submitted to general examination, and be left to make their different impressions on good and bad men, before the destined finisher of them was removed from the

^a "As far as ecclesiastical history can ascertain us of it, all the Apostles but John (and that to make good the prediction of Christ) suffered violent deaths by the hands of those that persecuted them merely for their doctrines."

Stillingfleet's Orig. Sac. p. 275. 4to. edit. 1680.
world.

world. At an interval of not so little as ' fifty years after the publication of St. Matthew's Gospel St. John is said to have sanctioned by his ' approbation the three first Gospels, to have supplied their ' deficiencies in his own, and to have refuted in it some " heretical opinions which had arisen concerning the person and dignity of his Saviour. In the same manner the Epistles had been generally received and had produced their effect, before he addressed to the seven Churches of Asia those exhortations and most remarkable predictions which close the sacred volume. Long was the beloved disciple preserved in this life, that by his concurrence at a distant

' Townson says, p. 109, that St. John's Gospel was published after the taking of Jerusalem: And again, p. 211, that the several circumstances as to the writing of it are strongly in favour of its late publication.

' Eusebius says of St. John, " τέλος δε επι την γραφην ελθειν τοι-
" ασι χαρι αιλιας τωι προαναγραφεντων τριων εις παντας ηδη και εις
" αυτοι διαδομενων αποδιξαδαι μιν φασι, αληθειαν αυτοις επιμαρτυ-
" ρησαντα." Hist. Eccl. l. iii. c. 25. Reading's Ed.

See also Cave's Hist. Liter. vol. i. p. 16.

' Jortin says, " St. John had seen the three first Gospels, for he wrote his own as a supplement to them."

Remarks on Eccl. Hist. vol. i. p. 46. 1st edit.

' That St John's Gospel was written against the Nicolaitans and Cerinthus is asserted by Iræneus, l. iii. c. 11. p. 188.

Jortin says, " the Ebionites denied the Divinity, and the " Docetæ the Humanity of Christ; and St. John seems to have " had them both in view."

Remarks on Eccl. Hist. vol. ii. p. 266.

period

period he might give the strongest confirmation to the veracity of the other Evangelists and Apostles, and that he might supply whatever could be wanted either to edify or to console the Christian believer till the consummation of all things: thus before he was admitted to the joy of his Lord, was he to facilitate the progress of others to the same happiness.

Various and decisive are the arguments, by which these Scriptures of the New Testament, as ^w Eusebius has ascertained their number and as we have them at present, come recommended to our ^x acceptance. A correspondence between our text and the citations and versions of the earliest ages establishes beyond a possibility of doubt the general authenticity of our modern copies. That the writings themselves were also given by Inspiration ought not to be

^w Hist. Eccl. l. iii. c. 25.

^x Mosheim says that the books of the New Testament were the greatest part of them received in the Church before the middle of the second Century—vol. i. p. 108.—English Translation, 8vo. 1782.

The Canonical books are supposed not to have been finally and authoritatively fixed before the Council of Laodicea, towards the end of the fourth century. But Lardner says that the Canon may justly be said to have been settled before that time.—Works, 8vo. 1788. vol. vi. p. 29.

doubted

doubted by any one, who admits the truth of the doctrines contained in them. For if the Holy Spirit was to direct the Apostles in their addresses to the ^y adversaries of our Religion ; we cannot suspect that his assistance would be withholden, when they were addressing themselves to the persons, for whose sake those adversaries were to be refuted, and that too in words, which (whether it were known immediately or not) were to be recorded for the instruction of all ages. In the same manner if the Holy Spirit interfered to controul and direct the Apostles with regard to the ^z places where they were to preach, and the Gospel which they preached was not taught them but by the ^a Revelation of Jesus Christ ; we may rest assured that they were not left to their own unassisted reason in delivering those among their doctrines, which were to be of the most extensive and lasting importance. And besides, if it was foretold that the Holy Spirit should ^b teach the Apostles all things, and bring all things to their remembrance, whatsoever Christ had said unto them, and expressly that he should ^c guide

^y Luke xxi. 15.^z Acts xiii. 2. Ibid. xvi. 6, 7.^a Gal. i. 12.^b John xiv. 26.^c John xvi. 13.

them

them to all truth ; doubtless, we have abundant reason to presume that their writings must have been delivered under ^d his infallible direction.—With regard to the first part of the sacred writings, which is contained in the Jewish Scriptures, our blessed Saviour ^e declares concerning the Law that it was easier for Heaven and Earth to pass away than that one tittle of it should fail : we are informed also on the ^f authority of the New Testament that prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost ; and besides, that David ^g spake by the Holy Ghost.—And since this is the case with regard to the different ^h parts of the Jewish Scriptures ; what shall we say concerning the Scriptures of the new and eternal covenant ? What shall we say con-

^d It is perhaps worthy of observation, that on the very day, which has always been celebrated by the Jews in remembrance of the wonderful delivery of the Law on mount Sinai, the Holy Ghost descended to direct and illuminate the minds of the Apostles.

^e Luke xvi. 17. ^f 2 Pet. i. 21. ^g Mark xii. 36.

^h A particular account of the books of the Old Testament is given by Eusebius from Josephus, and from Origen. See in Eusebius's Eccl. Hist. the account from Josephus, l. iii. c. 10 ; and from Origen, l. vi. c. 25. These books of the Old Testament were divided into the Law, the Prophets, and the Hagiographa : the last of these three divisions includes the Psalms, Proverbs, &c.

cerning

cerning those discourses of our blessed Saviour recorded in the Gospels, of which he himself speaks more forcibly than of the Law, declaring, ⁱ “ that Heaven and Earth shall pass away, but his word shall not pass away ? ” What shall we say concerning those passages of the Epistles which are expressly said to have been spoken by the Lord ? And what concerning numberless other passages both in the Gospels and Epistles, which are undistinguished from the rest, and foretell things to come, or relate things past, with a precision, for which it is impossible to account, except by ascribing it to that Divine Spirit who was to teach the Apostles and bring to their remembrance remote occurrences ? But we must not confine ourselves to particular passages of the New Testament. St. Paul ^k asserts, that “ all Scripture was given by Inspiration.” St. Peter ^l classes St. Paul’s writings among the Scriptures. And among the same Scriptures also have the writings of the other Apostles, and of their constant attendants, St. Mark and St. Luke, been uniformly, from the beginning, classed by the Church of Christ. How shall we then not say of all

ⁱ Mark xiii. 31.^k 2 Tim. iii. 16.^l 2 Pet. iii. 16.

E

these

these writings, what St. Paul, on a particular occasion, says of his own, “that they are “ the^m commandments of the Lord ?” And whatⁿ exceptions dare we make to the universal Inspiration of the subject-matter, at least, of compositions, delivered down to us under such circumstances ?

On this immoveable^o foundation of truth, and divine Inspiration, Christianity erected itself and went on to increase. Communities of Christians were formed ; regulations were instituted for their permanent^p edification and government ; and^q Bishops immediately ap-

^m 1 Cor. xiv. 37.

ⁿ That the writers themselves made no such exceptions, see Horbery’s 8th Sermon, 1774.

^o From Ignatius’s Epistle to the Philadelphians (c. 7.) it even appears, that the extraordinary Inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the first ages of Christianity was not confined to the writers of the New Testament exclusively. He says, when exhorting them to adhere to their Bishops, their body of Presbyters, and their Deacons, “ Οἱ πτεσαντες (forfitan ὑποπτευσαντες) με ὡς προειδοτα τον μερισμον τινων λεγειν ταυτα· μαρτυς δε μοι εἰ ὧ δειδεμαι ὅτι απο σαρκος ανδρωπιτης εκ εγνων. Το δε πνευμα εκηρυσσει λεγων ταυτι κ. τ. λ. In the same manner he says to the Ephesians (Epist. c. 20.) that he would instruct them in some points, “ μαλιστα ιαν ὁ Κυριος μοι αποκαλυψη.”

^p That forms of prayer were not only used by the primitive Christians, but also such as correspond in many instances with our own, and especially in the part which relates to the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, see Cave’s Prim. Christi. vol. i. c. 11 : and that rules of Faith were admitted by them, see Tertullian against Praxeas, chapter the 2d.

^q Clemens Romanus, the Fellow-labourer of St. Paul, says “ Και οἱ αποστολοι ἡμων εγνωσαν δια τε Κυριου ἡμων Ιησου Χριστου ὅτι εἰς
“ εἰς αἰ

pointed, and provision made for a succession of others, to superintend and enforce these regulations. In the history of the Apostles we read of Churches in Asia and other parts: and

“ *ἔσαι ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι τῆς ἐπισκοπῆς. διὰ ταύτην καὶ τῇ αἰτίᾳ προ-*
ῳσιν εὐληφοῦντες τελίαν κατεῖναι τῆς προειρημίνης (scilicet ἐπισκο-
πῆς καὶ διακονῆς) καὶ μεταξὺ ἐπισκοπῆς διδασκῶν, ὅπως, καὶ κοιμηθῶ-
σιν, διαδίδωνται ἑτέροι διδοκίμαστοι ἀνδρες τῇ λειτεργίᾳ αὐτῶν.”
 Epist. 1^{ma}. ad Cor. c. 44.

An account of the nature of the episcopal office in the first century may be seen in Mosheim's Eccl. Hist. vol. i. p. 105, &c. Engl. Edit. 1782.

Various passages might be cited from Ignatius's genuine Epistles to prove the great stress which this Disciple of St. John lays on the Episcopal authority. Indeed, Mosheim says of these Epistles, “ *nulla forte lis plerisque Ignatianarum Epistolarum*” “ *mota fuisset, nisi qui pro divino origine et antiquitate guber-*” “ *nationis episcopalis pugnant, causam suam ex his fulcire po-*” “ *tuisent.*” De rebus Christianorum ante Constant. p. 160.

Hooker goes so far as to challenge the sectaries of his time “ to find out but one Church upon the face of the whole earth, “ that hath been ordered by their discipline, or that hath not “ been ordered by ours, that is to say by episcopal regiment “ since the time of the blessed Apostles were here conver- “ sant.” Pref. to Eccl. Pol. p. 10. Edit. 1666.

See also on this subject Stillingfleet's Orig. Britan. p. 74—83. Cave's Histor. Liter. vol. i. p. 42. Heylyn's Reformation justified, p. 202 and 251. Collier's Eccl. Hist. vol. ii. p. 617. and Bingham's Antiquities of the Christian Church, b. ii. c. 1. Fol. Edit. 1726. What Lord Chancellor King says on episcopal Government in his “ Enquiry into the constitution, “ &c. of the Primitive Church” is well answered by a Presbyter of the Church of England in a book, entitled “ an original “ Draught of the Primitive Church,” and published in the year 1717. An answer to it may also be found in Bishop Smalridge's Sermons, Fol. p. 107—112.

among their Epistles we find some, which make express mention of ' Bishops, Deacons, and Elders, and which were purposely written to instruct and confirm the new Bishops. That these Bishops also were distinguished from the Elders or Presbyters, ' before or very soon ' after the death of St. John, the most zealous friends of the Presbyterian form of Church government allow. And were we even to concede that this distinction was not always made antecedently to the expiration of

* 1 Tim. chapters 3d and 5th.

* Chillingworth informs us in his " Apostolical Institution of Episcopacy demonstrated" (which is comprised in four pages) that Petrus Molinaeus in a book, purposely written in defence of the Presbyterian government, acknowledgeth " that presently " after the Apostles' times, or even in their time (as ecclesiastical " history witnesseth) it was ordained that in every city one of " the Presbytery should be called a Bishop, who should have " Preeminence over his colleagues to avoid confusion which oft " times ariseth out of equality. And truly this form of go- " vernment all Churches everywhere received." Chillingworth adds that another great defender of the Presbytery Theodorus Beza confesseth in effect the same thing. He also subjoins in a Note the concessions of two other writers from Geneva: referring his readers at length for fuller proofs to Dr. Hammond's *Dissertations against Blondel*, which he says " were never answered and never will." See Chillingworth's *Safe-Way*, &c. —P. 321. 4th Edit. London 1674.

* Walo Messalinus de *Episcopis et Presbyteris* (8vo. p. 253. Lugd. Bat. 1641) says that the distinction arose about the beginning or middle of the second Century. And Blondel in his *Apol. pro sententia Hieronymi* (Preface, p. 11. Amstelodami 1646) makes it commence about the year 135.

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the Apostolical age; no reason can be assigned for an universal prevalence of it immediately after that period, which is not derived from decisions and injunctions, * delivered down by the Apostles themselves, concerning their successors in the pastoral care and government of the Church.

The early Bishops fell little short of the Apostles in zeal and integrity. These holy men, having extended to the utmost of their abilities the knowledge of the truth, taught their converts by their own Example to live according to the doctrines of their profession, and by the same persuasive motive made them rejoice and triumph, when they were called upon to crown a well-spent life by a death of pious fortitude.

* During the life-time of the Apostles, presbyters, as Dr. Bentley insists, were called *ἐπισκοποι*, or overseers, just as superintendents in the Heathen world were at that time so denominated on different occasions. But the Apostles having appointed their successors in the several cities and communities and being themselves removed from this world, the holy men thus appointed, though evidently the successors of the Apostles and not of the first Bishops, were too modest to assume the title of Apostles and contented themselves with that of Bishops: and “from that time it was agreed over Christendom at once in the very next generation after the Apostles to assign and appropriate to them the word *ἐπισκοπος*, or Bishop.” See Phileleutherus Lipsienfis, Remark 35.

How far indeed the successors of the Apostles in the superintendence of the Church succeeded them also in equal or even in similar powers of supernatural agency, is a question, which the injudicious assertions of the friends, and the artful insinuations of the enemies of Christianity, render it very * difficult for the present age to determine. But (blessed be the great Contriver and Perfecter of our Salvation!) the determination is not essential to our Faith. Already had the Almighty set his seal to the truth of Christianity. Already had those miracles of our great Redeemer and his original disciples, which are recorded in holy Writ and which admit of proof in every age, laid deep the foundation of that Religion against which the gates of Hell were never to prevail. It appears to have been † necessary

* Jortin says, "I would not engage for the truth of any of the miracles after the year 107: but I wish to be classed with the doubters, not the deniers." Rem. on Eccl. Hist. vol. ii. p. 71. He must however be supposed here to except the miracle on Julian's attempt to rebuild the temple of Jerusalem. See Notes on the 6th Sermon.

† Chrysostom says, "Μη τοιουν το με γινεσθαι νυν σημαια τεκμηριον ποιε τε μη γενησθαι ποτε" και γαρ τοτε χρησιμωις εγενετο, και νυν χρησιμωις ου γινεται." And again, "νυν απο των θειων γραφων και των τοτε σημειων την πισιν αν λεγομεν παρεχομεθα." Hom. 6. in 1 Cor. 2. p. 276. tom. iii. Eton.

So likewise St Augustin says, "Accepimus majores nostros ex gradu fidei, quo a temporalibus ad æterna conscenditur,"
"visi-

that we should have the means of proving that our blessed Saviour authenticated his pretensions by supernatural actions. It was perhaps necessary that we should have means of proving also that the Apostles, who were the witnesses of his resurrection and ascension, attracted the respect and commanded the belief of mankind by the power with which they were endued from on high. But no reason has ever been assigned, why we should be enabled to prove that miracles were performed by Christians in any succeeding age, which might not encourage us to hope for similar interpositions in our own. Not that it is my intention to question any authentic facts of this nature which are left us upon record; much less to give up, as fictions of pious fraud, all the relations of subsequent miracles. It is my intention merely to assert that these miracles are not at present * essential to the vindication of Christianity: and if we have not sufficient

“visibilia miracula (nec enim aliter poterant) secutos esse: per quos id actum est ut necessaria non essent posteris.”

De vera Religione, c. 25. Paris 1679.

^z “With any other miracles” (than those of Christ and his Apostles) “however numerous, however confidently asserted or plausibly set forth, we have nothing to do. There may have been ten thousand impostures of this sort.”

Hurd’s Lincoln’s Inn Sermons, vol. ii. p. 79.

arguments to establish the credit of those among them which are genuine; it ought to be referred to the expiration of the period for which they were designed. They were designed to make up for the want of general information concerning the nature and evidences of our Religion, which must have been in an eminent degree the irremediable misfortune of numberless individuals in its early ages: they were designed also to comfort and support the Christians of those ages under their peculiar circumstances of distress. Being to us therefore in both those respects unnecessary, they may well be supposed for that reason to have descended with a less decisive weight of evidence.

But, whatever were the assistances afforded to the early Pastors of the Church, they appear to have made an active use of their powers, whether natural or inspired. They converted great numbers * every where to the

* Justin Martyr tells Trypho, “ οὐδὲ ἐν γὰρ ὅλῳς ἐστὶ τὸ γένος ἀν-
 “ θρώπων, εἴτε βαρβάρων, εἴτε Ἑλλήνων, εἴτε ἀπλῶς ὅτινις οὖν ὀνοματὶ πρῶσ-
 “ αγορευομένων, ἢ ἀμαξοδίων ἢ αἰοικῶν καλουμένων, ἢ ἐν σκηναῖς κληνδύρο-
 “ φων οἰκούντων, ἐν οἷς μὴ διὰ τὴν ὀνοματὸς τῆς σαυρωδείας Ἰησοῦ εὐχαι καὶ
 “ εὐχαρισταὶ τῷ πατρὶ καὶ ποιητῇ τῶν ὅλων γίνονται,” p. 345. Edit.
 Par. 1615. An enumeration of the nations by which Christia-
 nity was received in Tertullian's time may be seen in his
 Treatise advers. Judæos, c. 7. which he concludes in this very
 remarkable

Faith: and if the unaffected piety and zeal of such converts to Christianity in the three first centuries, and the want of these qualities in its subsequent professors, be considered; it will perhaps not be thought a violation of charity to doubt whether there were not more Christian virtue in the world before the expi-

remarkable manner. "Christi autem regnum et nomen ubique porrigitur, ubique creditur, ab omnibus gentibus supernumeratis colitur, ubique regnat, ubique adoratur, omnibus ubique tribuitur æqualiter: non regis apud illum major gratia, non Barbari alicujus inferior lætitia, non dignitatum aut natalium cujusquam discreta merita, omnibus æqualis, omnibus rex, omnibus iudex, omnibus Deus et Dominus est." Eusebius says on the same subject that Christian Churches were erected "ὅτι ἐν ἀθλοῖς πᾶσι καὶ ἀφανοῖ τοποῖς, ἀλλ' ἐν ταῖς μαλίστα διακρίσεσσι πολὺς ἰδρυμένους· ἐκ' αὐτῆς λόγῳ τῆς Ῥωμαίων βασιλευμένης, ἐπὶ τε τῆς Αἰγυπτίου, καὶ Ἀντιοχείων, καὶ ὅλης τε τῆς Αἰγυπτῆς, καὶ Λιβύης, Ἑυρώπης τε καὶ Ἀσίας, ἐν τε κώμαις τε καὶ χερμαῖς, καὶ παντοῖαις ἔθνεσι." Dem. Evang. l. iii. p. 138.

See also the citation above made from p. 112. of the same work. Arnobius likewise says, "Vel hæc saltem nobis faciant argumenta credendi quod jam per omnes terras, in tam brevi tempore et parvo, immensi nominis hujus sacramenta diffusa sunt, quod nulla jam natio est tam barbari moris quæ non ejus amore versa mollior sit." Adv. Gentes, l. ii. p. 44.

With regard to Heathen authorities concerning the extensive propagation of Christianity in its early ages see the passages adduced by Dr. Powell from Suetonius, Dio, Julian, Tacitus, Pliny, &c. Sermon X, p. 154—162.

See moreover on this subject Stillingfleet's Orig. Britan. p. 54.

See concerning the characters of the Christians in the first ages what Cave says in the fourth chapter of his "Primitive Christianity;" and what he urges at large, in the remaining parts of this work, on the manner in which they discharged their Duty towards God, themselves, and their neighbours.

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ration of those centuries, than detractors from the number and integrity of the early professors of our Religion can prove to have existed at any future period. But let not the suggestion of such a doubt be supposed to carry with it any insinuation that the early Christians were exempted from all the bad consequences of the depravity of human nature. Both the censures and the exhortations of the Apostolical Epistles prove the contrary, even with regard to the Apostles' own age. And the same appears to have been the case in an increasing and ^c alarming degree, as we advance nearer to the reign of Constantine. However, it was by no means the case in any degree to be compared with the habitual profligacy, which has since prevailed among Christians and discovered itself by continued prevalences both of fraudulent superstition and of sceptical indifference.

Nor were the early pastors less anxious to defend than to enlarge their care. On all sides grievous wolves entered in not sparing

^c Eusebius says of the Christian Church about the year 300,
 “ὡς ἐκ τῆς ἐπὶ πλεον ἐλευθερίας ἐπὶ χαυνότητι καὶ γνῶριαν τὰ καθ’ ἡ-
 “μας μετελλαττίτο, ἀλλῶν ἀλλοις διαφθονομένην καὶ διαλοιδορούμενην
 “καὶ μονοῦνχι ἡμῶν αὐτῶν ἑαυτοῖς προσπολεμικῶν ὀπλοῖς, ἐν ᾧ τῷ
 “χρῶσι, καὶ δόρασι τοῖς διὰ λόγων ἀρχόντων τε ἀρχῆσι προσηγγινύτων, καὶ
 “λαῶν ἐπὶ λαῶς κατασφαιζόντων.” Eccl. Hist. l. viii. c. i.

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the flock. ^d Perverse brethren distracted the minds of the weak : and cruel adversaries from without assaulted not only the Faith, but also the lives, of those who called on the name of Christ. While however the common enemy was ready to destroy every professor of Christianity; it was not probable that there should be many pretended converts to this Religion : and among its sincere members less was to be feared from dissension of opinion. Though therefore the spiritual pastor was not exempt from much anxious labour in securing his flock from internal heresy ; it must at this early period have been his principal care to guard it against the foreign enemy. Accordingly, attempts were made at different times to obviate the slander, and to disarm the malice, of the Heathen world by translations of the Scriptures, and by representations, in numerous ^e apologies, of the true principles of Christi-

^d See Euseb. Hist. Eccl. l. iv. c. 22.

See also in the same Hist. l. v. c. 20. an account of Irenæus' zeal in refuting heresies.

^e Quadratus and Aristides wrote apologies for the Christian Religion and addressed them to Adrian.

Euseb. Hist. Eccl. l. iv. c. 3.

Various other apologies were written at different times on the same subject. Those of Athenagoras and Melito compared with the apologies of Tertullian and Justin Martyr have greatly the advantage. Justin says the latter are the performances of
very

anity. These exertions did indeed at particular times produce the desired effect: but the cessation of persecution, which they produced, was usually of very short continuance. It was^f inferred before the commencement of the fifth century from figurative and fanciful explanations of Scripture that ten general persecutions were to befall the Church. Hence persecutions have been magnified or extenuated, as might best serve to mark out with distinction the number which was to be completed. And hence also modern Sceptics have

very clowns compared with the former—Note on his Rem. on Eccl. Hist. vol. ii. p. 85.

^f Sulpicius Severus, who died about the beginning of the fifth century, says “Etenim sacris vocibus decem plagis mundum afficiendum pronuntiatur est.” Sac. Hist. l. ii. c. 48. p. 370. 8vo. Ed. 1665.

Augustine and Orosius, according to the opinions of their times, refer for Scriptural prefigurations on the subject to the ten plagues of Egypt, and the ten oppositions which Moses encountered from the Egyptians. Augustine enumerates the dates of ten persecutions of the Christians before the time of Constantine and says: “plagas enim Ægyptiorum, quoniam decem fuerunt antequam inde exire inciperet populus Dei, putant ad hunc intellectum esse referendas, ut novissima Antichristi persecutio similis videatur undecimæ plagæ qua Ægyptii, dum hostiliter sequerentur Hebræos in mari rubro,—perierunt.” De Civitat. Dei, l. xviii. c. 52. Orosius recounts the ten persecutions after Augustine and says explicitly, “Decem ibi traditiones adversus Moysen, hic decem edicta adversus Christum,” l. vii. c. 27. p. 533. Ed. Havercampi.

Besides the part of Scripture, thus referred to by Augustine and Orosius, others refer, but without better foundation, to Rev. xvii. 12—14. See on this subject Mosheim, vol. i. p. 72.
been

been led to question the reality of every such extraordinary persecution. But the consequences, which have ensued from injudicious inferences drawn by the professors of our Religion in its degenerate days, cannot justify us in rejecting the true history of its best and most ^c disinterested members; or in giving up the ^b argument, which arises in its favour from the extensive sufferings of its early professors. That there were general and grievous persecutions of the early Christians the ^c best-informed writers declare. These persecutions also continued in a greater or less degree from their first ^b commencement to the civil establishment of Christianity. Intolerance, once raised among Heathen nations to the extravagance of inflicting the most cruel death on the

^a S. Severus says, p. 368. “Certatim in gloriosa certamina ruebatur, multoque avidius tum martyria gloriosis mortibus quærebantur, quam nunc Episcopatus pravis ambitionibus appetuntur.”

^b “The wonderful behaviour of the ancient Christians may justly be accounted a proof of the truth of our Religion; and we should deserve to be blamed and despised, if we parted with it and gave it up tamely on account of a few objections.”

Jortin's Remarks on Eccl. Hist. vol. ii. p. 149.

^c Tacitus, Suetonius, Pliny, and others, whose names may be seen in the Prolegomena to Cave's Hist. Liter. p. 38. See also on this subject at large Euseb. Hist. Eccl. l. viii. c. 1—14. and Cave's Primitive Christianity, vol. i. p. 195. 3d Ed.

^b The persecutions of Christians commenced under Nero—S. Severus, p. 350.

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peaceable professors of a Religion, the most pure, and the most strict in requiring its followers to abstain from the rites of idolatrous worshippers and to endeavour by every means to convert them to the service of the living God, could not be expected to subside for any considerable time, while the civil power continued in opposition to the truth and the same difference of religious opinion was zealously maintained. It might indeed at times be restrained by the interposition of humanity or the justice of public authority. But superstition, being always ready to crush its enemies by force in proportion as it is unable to defend itself by reason, would eagerly embrace every opportunity of returning to persecution. Accordingly, we find that it was not sufficient for the Roman Emperours on particular occasions to repeal the laws enacted against Christians ; they were compelled¹ farther to decree severe penalties against their accusers. So forward was the zeal of Polytheism to bring to punishment the deserters or the despisers of its public institutions ! But it was only for short intervals that the accusation of an innocent

¹ This was done by Adrian and Antoninus Pius.

Euseb. Hist. Eccl. l. iv. c. 9. 13.

See also S. Severus, p. 365.

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Christian was deemed criminal. During the reign of some of the most celebrated Emperours it was regarded as highly meritorious. And though, from the extraordinary blaze of particular persecutions, some countenance may be given to a numerical partition of them ; yet it may safely be asserted that Christianity was in a^m general state of persecution from the days of Nero to those of Constantine, and that this cruelty was rather remitted at particular times, than the toleration of our Religion disturbed by any number of temporary persecutions. Nor shall we have any doubt that it may be safely thus asserted, when we consider the influence of large bodies of men and that the Roman^a Senate, as a body, was never favourable to Christianity. The suspension of these persecutions, upon representations of the real principles of Christianity, proves that their violence was often owing to the malicious and ignorant slanders of its enemies ; and, towards the conclusion, of none perhaps more than of Celsus.

But, however much we may deplore the

^m See Stillingfleet's Orig. Britan. p. 56.

^a " Marcus Aurelius and other Emperours not void of good qualities oppressed the Christians to gain the esteem of the Senate ; who, as a body, were never favourable to Christianity" Jortin's Rem. vol. ii. p. 172.

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distresses in which the early Christians were involved from the prevailing ignorance of their Religion ; there were other evils derived from the same source, which ought not in the present times to be passed over less noticed or less lamented. It has been insultingly asked by modern ° unbelievers, whence it happened that so many of the wisest and most virtuous Heathens of those early ages remained unconverted to Christianity ? These Heathens paid no serious attention to the evidences of our Religion. The Christian sect (as we are ^p informed by an inhabitant of Rome) was every where spoken against ; and from thence its pretensions were not fairly examined. “ The religious tenets of the Galileans or Christians,” Mr. Gibbon ^a declares, “ were never made a “ subject of punishment nor even of inquiry.” And farther he himself ^r allows the Christians to be “ the friends of mankind ;” though Tacitus ^s informs us that the Romans considered them in a diametrically opposite light : “ that the Romans condemned them not so “ much for the crime of setting fire to the “ city, as for their hatred of mankind.” Ta-

* See Gibbon's Hist. vol. i. p. 516.

^p Acts xxviii. 32.

^a History, vol. i. p. 537.

^r Ibid. p. 537.

^s Annal. l. xv. c. 44.

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citus therefore at once supplies us with a proof of the ignorance of the Romans with regard to the Christians, and with a presumptive proof also of such a prejudice in this people against them from their supposed hatred of mankind, as must effectually indispose all, who were influenced by it, for any proper inquiry into their Religion. In reality the Jews and Christians were either ' confounded together at this period, or at farthest thought sects of the same Religion : and the charge of ignorance and superstition, with which the Jews had ever been branded, was indiscriminately applied to both. It was therefore thought needless by Heathen pride to examine into the

^t This appears from what Suetonius says of the expulsion of the Jews (or Christians) from Rome: "*Judæos, impulsore Chresto, assidue tumultuantes Romæ expulit.*" In *Vita Claudii*, c. 25.

The same appears to have been the case also with regard to the Jews and Egyptians. Mr. Hume asserts (Note on his *Essays* vol. ii. p. 461.) " that ancient writers of the greatest genius " (Tacitus and Suetonius) were not able to observe any difference " between the Egyptian and the Jewish Religion." If so, how miserably ignorant must they have been on the subject ! And what opinion must Tacitus have had of the Christians, whom he probably did not separate from the Jews ; when he joins the latter with the Egyptians and says — "*Actum et de sacris Ægyptiis Judaicisque pellendis ; factumque patrum Consultum ut quatuor millia libertini generis ea superstitione infecta, queis idonea ætas, in insulam Sardiniam veherentur coercendis illic latrociniis, et si ob gravitatem cœli interissent, vile damnum : Cæteri cederent Italia nisi certam ante diem profanos ritus exuissent ?*" *Ann. l. ii. c. 85.*

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evidences of a Religion, which it was every where taken for granted was false. And the same contemptuous "indifference with regard to the disputes of Jews and Christians about words, and names, and their law; which Gallio, * Seneca's brother, openly professed when he was Deputy of Achaia, was the common method of treating Christianity among the philosophers of those days. We have a remarkable proof of this in the younger Pliny's well-known Epistle to Trajan. No mention occurs throughout the whole of any inquiry which had been made into the foundation of the Christian Religion. Nothing farther had at all been inquired into, than the behaviour of it's professors. Of this Pliny was called upon to take cognizance, as a civil magistrate. Even to have examined into the general pretensions of their Religion might have appeared to admit the possibility, at least, of its truth; a concession, humiliating to the pride of a "philosopher, and dangerous to the interests of a dependant on a Heathen court. Without any such examination therefore he professes at once " * he had not the least doubt, what-

* Acts xviii. 15.

† Tacit. Annal. l. xv. c. 73.

‡ See Bp. Warburton's Julian, p. 22.

* "Neque dubitabam, qualecunque esset quod faterentur, per-
vicaciam certe et inflexibilem obstinationem debere puniri."

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“ever were their confession, that their stubbornness and inflexible obstinacy ought certainly to be punished.” Indeed the very names, by which the Heathen writers distinguish Christianity, afford abundant proof of their ignorance of it. Who, that knows any thing of the real nature of our Religion, can think when ^y Pliny calls it “*Superstitio prava et immodica*,” ^z Tacitus “*exitiabilis Superstitio*,” and Suetonius “*Superstitio nova et malefica*,” that they had at all enquired into the Religion, which they thus malevolently and erroneously ^b characterize? And what reasonable man can join with the unbelievers, above alluded to, in ^c expecting that the miraculous appearances of nature recorded in the Scriptures of our Religion should, if true, be mentioned by such writers; any more than that they should themselves become its converts? Especially too, as we know that these are not the only remarkable circumstances of

^y Epist. l. x. Ep. 97.

^z Annal. l. xv. c. 44.

^a In Nerone, c. 16.

^b See concerning the different calumnies, which were thus propagated with regard to Christianity and its professors, the passages cited at large from the Apologists and various other early writers in the four first chapters of Cave's “*Primitive Christianity*.”

^c See Gibbon's Hist. v. i. p. 518.

^d Eastern history which European writers have passed over in silence. We know that they say nothing even of the * existence of cities of Syria, the most magnificent that imagination can conceive. But indeed what comparison can there ever be between the silence of remote and inattentive philosophers and the positive testimony of eye-witnesses ?

If any actual enquiry into these and the other miracles of Christianity be supposed to have been made by the writers in question ; their silence will in that case become a powerful argument in its favour. Surely, if they

^d The darkness at our Saviour's crucifixion appears to have been a circumstance confined to Eastern history. For the γη (Matt. xxvii. 45.) over which it was spread, does not necessarily include more than the land of Judæa. And there also it was by no means total ; since, at the time when the miracle was wrought, it did not hinder the persons around the cross from seeing our Saviour and each other distinctly. Bp. Warburton in his Julian observes (p. 69, 70.) on a Jewish writer, who says that at the time of the defeat of Julian's attempt to rebuild the temple of Jerusalem " there was an earthquake over all the Earth : " " The Historian's calling it an earthquake over all the earth is " in the language of the Jews, and the same with that of the " Evangelist, who tells us that at the crucifixion there was darkness over all the earth."

^e Volney says, " that Balbec is mentioned only by one writer, John of Antioch, who attributes the building of it to Antoninus Pius," *Travels Engl. Edit. vol. ii. p. 245.*—And that the world had very confused ideas of the power and grandeur which Palmyra had possessed : " They were scarcely even suspected in Europe till towards the end of the last century." *Vol. ii. p. 277.*

enquired

enquired into the miraculous proofs of our Religion; they either found those proofs fictitious or not. If fictitious; many reasons may be assigned why they should expose the fiction to the world, whether they were good or bad men. But if on the contrary they did not find them fictitious; if good men, they must themselves profess the Christian Faith and thenceforth becoming its advocates expose their testimony to the imputation of partiality: or, if bad men, they would (to act most consistently with worldly policy) pass the whole over in silence. For, to suppose that a good man should admit the truth of a miracle and not believe the doctrine which it confirms, or that a bad man should bear witness to a circumstance which condemns himself, is equally unreasonable. If therefore the silence of the unconverted philosopher operate at all with regard to our Religion; it must operate powerfully in its favour.

That before the civil establishment of Christianity many Heathen philosophers were distinguished by such a conversion to its belief, as might be expected from the enquiries of those good men among them who did not find its evidences fictitious, is ^f indisputable. Their

^f See Arnobius *adv. Gentes*, l. ii. p. 44: and Grotius *de Verit.* l. ii. c. 4.

enquiries also were often excited in a manner the most creditable to our Religion. In the schools of their celebrated Leaders these philosophers had been instructed concerning the excellency of virtue, and had heard of its superiority to all worldly affliction and even to death itself. But the schools, which they frequented, could supply them with the ^a theory only of this heroism. When therefore they saw their admired speculations realized in Christian Martyrs; when they saw illiterate crowds press forward with eagerness to meet sufferings, which it would have been the most ardent wish of other men to avoid; when they saw also that steadfastness in suffering, which they had before thought to be more than human, display itself in ^b women and children; they were divested of the common ⁱ prejudices against the sufferers and ^k led to

^a Plato is supposed to have obscured his doctrines that he might not fall under the sentence of Socrates. And Aristotle is known to have fled from Athens for the same reason. See Origen against Celsus, l. i. c. 65.—Paris. 1733.

^b See Dodwell De fortitudine Martyrum, in his 12th dissertation on St. Cyprian.

ⁱ Justin Martyr says, “Αυτος εγω τοις Πλατωνος χαιρων διδασκασι διαβαλλομενες ακων Χριστιανες, ορων δε και αφοβους προς θανατον και παντα τα νομιζομενα φοβερα, εννοιον αδυνατον ειναι εν κακια και φιληδονια υπαρχειν αυτης· τις γαρ φιληδοτος η ακρατης και ανθρωπινην σαρκων βοραι ηθεμενος αγαθον, δυναιτ’ αν θανατον ασπαξισθαι οπως των αυτη αγαθων γενηθη, κ. τ. λ.” Justin’s 1st Apol. p. 50. edit. Par. 1615. See also Lactantius de Justit. l. v. c. 13.

^k Tertullian says of the sufferings of Christians, “Quis enim
“ non

enquire into the foundation of this unusual fortitude. And their enquiries, thus ultimately directed to the miraculous evidences of our Religion, often ended in a profession of the same Faith and a display of the same fortitude. Such was the conversion of Tertullian; and such was the conversion and glorious ¹ death also of Justin Martyr.

From some indeed of these converts arose evils of the most serious consequence to Christianity. The prejudices, incident to human nature, suffered not all the new and philosophical believers in our Religion to sacrifice the learning of their schools to its solemn, but simple, truths. Hence numerous sects of both ^m Gnostic and Platonic Christians, or of Christians who mingled human knowledge of different kinds with divine Revelation in their religious tenets: hence Revelation was wrested to support fanciful conjectures, ⁿ heresies were

*“ non contemplatione ejus concutitur ad requirendum quid in-
tus in re sit? Quis non, ubi requisivit, accedit? Ubi ac-
cessit, pati exoptet?”* Apol. ad finem.

¹ See an account of Justin Martyr's death in Euseb. Hist. Eccl. l. iv. c. 16.

^m Mr. Bingham says that the term “Gnostic” was originally applied in a good sense to Christians, as to those who were possessed of the best knowledge; but that it was afterwards aped and abused by others. Antiquities, b. 1. c. 1. sect. 3.

ⁿ Jortin observes that most of the ancient heresies were a mixture of philosophy, Greek or Oriental, and Christianity—

introduced, the peace of the infant Church disturbed, and a foundation laid for those numberless dissensions, which added (as was before remarked) to the anxiety of Christian Pastors during the time of persecution, and prevented them in future ages from enjoying the happy effects of toleration and establishment.

That however a very considerable proportion of the converts to Christianity during the three first centuries consisted of men of illiterate education can be no discredit to that Religion, of which it was a distinguishing mark that "the poor had the Gospel preached unto them." The Apostles and their successors, in general, were men of this sort. They were, in general, remarkable neither for their learning nor for their eloquence. They express the most pious sentiments in the most simple language and the most important truths without ornament. But the piety of their sentiments and the truth of their doctrines were sufficient under Providence to make their Religion prevail : and, in spite of

Remarks, vol. ii. p. 266. And again, "the philosophers who passed from Judaism and Paganism to Christianity corrupted the simplicity of the Gospel, turned it into a contentious Religion, and filled it with unedifying speculations."

Vol. ii. p. 273.

all

all opposition, it continued in successive ages to prevail with the mass of mankind by the conviction of ° honest and humble attention, till those great men, who were not to be allured by its own excellence, found it expedient from worldly motives to come over to its side; being influenced in this most important of all concerns by the conduct of an illiterate multitude and not by the discoveries of their own superior ² wisdom. This is the great argument, which is inferred in favour of our Religion from its peculiar mode of propagation. The argument is not inferred from any number of wise or powerful men, who embraced Christianity in this or that place at any given time; but from the triumph which it obtained over the wisdom and power of the world by a process, contrary to what was ever observed in the success of any other institution: the foolish things of the world were chosen ³ to confound the wise and the weak to confound the mighty.

But in reality the truth of Christianity, and the satisfaction resulting from a conviction

° See the Introduction to Bp. Warburton's Julian, p. 26.

² See the same, p. 25.

³ 1 Cor. i. 27.

of

of that truth, are very little concerned in the enquiries which at present form a considerable part of ecclesiastical history during the first ages of our Religion: in enquiries concerning the miracles ascribed to the successors of the Apostles, concerning the extent of the early propagation of our Religion, the extent of the persecution of its professors, and the reasons from the beginning why it was not generally received by men of learning and why universal mention was not made by them of its miraculous proofs. These are subjects, on which the enemies of our Faith have been able to avail themselves of the errors, the omissions, and other imperfections, of its friends as well as foes. With them therefore these are favourite topics of declamation; and from thence they necessarily make a part of those subsequent observations on the history of our Religion which are intended to vindicate its truth.

It is sufficient with regard to the original propagation of Christianity; at least indeed it is sufficient for our satisfaction, as far as the foundation of our Faith is concerned in this important part of our history; if we are informed—that the publication of our Religion was entrusted, after the ascension of its great
Author,

Author, to poor and illiterate men who had been his Disciples and witnesses from the beginning:—that these men were enabled by supernatural means to confirm the truth of their doctrines and to preach the Gospel to all nations:—that their industry was proportioned to the importance of their commission and to their means of success:—that numbers were converted by their preaching:—that, by the miracles performed before the expiration of the apostolical age, by the writings of the New in addition to those of the Old Testament, and by institutions appointed for the public profession of our Religion, provision was made for its regular and permanent maintenance among its converts, and for the conversion of men of every age to its belief, without the aid and in opposition to all the efforts of human power and human wisdom:—and that all those, who were thus employed at first to publish and confirm the doctrines of Christianity, having before given up every prospect in this world for its sake, at length, when brought to the trial, cheerfully laid down their lives in at-

* Every one of the Apostles was actually brought to the trial, except St. John. See the passage above cited from Stillingfleet's *Orig. Sac.* p. 275.

testation

testation of its truth; leaving to latest posterity the most unequivocal assurance of the reality of the miraculous events, recorded by them in the New Testament, which had been the objects of their senses and the original foundation of their faith. Few as these circumstances are, they comprehend in reality all the information concerning the first propagation of our Religion, which reasonable men can think necessary for the confirmation of its truth. As to all other miracles besides those which are recorded in Holy Writ, they are not to be reckoned (as hath been fully declared) among the present proofs of our Religion. And though strong arguments may be drawn in its favour from the extent of its early propagation, and from the extent of the persecution which it overcame; even these are not to be considered as absolutely necessary to our cause. The various errors, whether with regard to fictitious miracles or ill-founded representations of other sorts, which were intermingled with the history of our Religion by its advocates, and the diversified opposition and contempt which it encountered from its enemies, prove only, what we every day experience, that Christianity may be defended with little judgment and that the most gracious offers may be rejected and insulted.

Such

Such however, as they are above sketched, are the occurrences (whether they are all essential to the confirmation of our faith or not) which form the principal outlines of the Christian history from its publication after the resurrection of Christ to its establishment by Constantine. During a period of nearly 300 years, our Religion, having been openly ' professed under the institutions originally appointed for its maintenance, was exposed to all those calamities, which arise from the malice of powerful enemies and from imperfections of various kinds in misguided friends. But, under every ' disadvantage, its intrinsic purity and external evidences, aided by the influence of the Holy Spirit, made it go on and gain strength; till Constantine, encouraged and perhaps persuaded by the " number of his

' See Jos. Mede's discourse concerning Churches: Works, Book 2d, Edit. 1672 :—and Cave's " Primitive Christianity."

' " Ecclesiastical history will shew us the amazing progress " of Christianity through the Roman empire, through the East " and through the West, during the three first centuries: though " the powers of this world strenuously opposed it; though poverty and infamy, distress and oppression, the loss of friends, " property, liberty, and life were often the lot of its professors." Jortin's 2d Charge, Sermons, vol. vii. p. 382.

" Cave proves that in the reign of Dioclesian there were above forty Basilicæ or Churches in Rome only. Cave's Primitive Christianity, vol. i. p. 133.

And Dr. Powell says, in opposition to many of our modern writers, that, " when Constantine ascended the throne, the Christian party was equal, perhaps superior, to their adversaries " through the whole Empire." 10th Sermon, p. 165.

Christian

Christian subjects, proclaimed himself a convert and guardian of Christianity. From his time, notwithstanding the apostacy of one succeeding Emperour and the profligacy of many more, we may affirm that Kings became its ^w nursing fathers and Queens its nursing mothers. Having raised itself to the favourable attention of Princes by the possession, which it had before taken of their subjects' hearts, it has thenceforth received protection from them ; and has itself in return protected both their persons and authority.

^w If. xlix. 23.

S E R M O N III.

I PET. III. 15.

Be ready always to give an answer to every man, that asketh you a reason of the Hope that is in you.

THE present discourse is to carry our observations on the history of our Religion from the establishment of it by Constantine to the commencement of the Reformation.

The establishment of our holy Religion by Constantine without doubt filled the minds of its sincere professors with the purest joy. Whoever considered the excellence of the Religion itself, and the protection which it was now to receive from the civil power, might well be led with pious fervour to imagine that the blessings, with which it was ushered in, were thenceforth to receive their accomplishment:

ment : that thenceforth ^aglory would be given to God in the highest, and that on earth there would be peace and good will towards men. And indeed to this period ^bis referred the glorious triumph of the Church, celebrated in the seventh Chapter of the Revelation of St. John. But the depravity of the human heart from the beginning opposed itself to its remedy, and infected not only the unlearned part of Christians, but the teachers of Christianity themselves ; thus making way for general and permanent corruptions. Among the Apostles we have a Judas Iscariot. In the ages immediately subsequent, and among the rulers also of the Church, arose men of perverse minds and totally unworthy of their sacred station. But the number of unworthy rulers, no less than the general number of insincere and unworthy professors of our Religion, was restrained in the early ages by persecution, and is small, when compared with the swarms of both, which under the future and peaceable state of the Church were more zealous to partake of its ^cemoluments than

^a Luke ii. 14.

^b See Bp. Newton on the Prophecies, vol. iii. p. 74—77.

^c S. Severus, p. 368. Stillingfleet's Orig. Britan. p. 178.

to

to promote in any respect its spiritual interests. As soon as Bishops were ^d elected by intrigues and embarked in the support of factions, the qualifications for their high rank and a proper demeanour in it were no longer usual and distinguishing parts of their character. Different Princes contended for temporal power; and different Bishops grasped as ^e contentiously at each other's ecclesiastical jurisdiction. One pernicious consequence of these contests is to be lamented in the want of purity, which during the contention and in succeeding times prevailed throughout the Christian world. The pro-

^d This censure ought not to be equally applied to all the Bishops of this period. When Ammianus Marcellinus speaks of the manner of obtaining Bishopricks, and of the luxury of Bishops; he says there was a very great difference between the Bishops of cities and those of provinces. "*Neque ego abnuo ostentationem rerum considerans urbanarum, hujus rei cupidus ob impetrandum quod appetunt omni contentione laterum jurgari debere: quum id adepti futuri sunt ita securi ut dentur oblationibus matronarum, procedantque vehiculis indentes, circumspēcte vestiti, epulas curantes profusas, adeo ut eorum convivia regales superant mensas. Qui esse poterant beati revera, si, magnitudine urbis despecta quam vitii opponunt, ad imitationem antistitum quorundam provincialium viverent; quos tenuitas edendi potandique parcissime, vilitas etiam indumentorum et supercilia humum spectantia perpetuo numini verisque ejus cultoribus ut puros commendant et verecundos.*" C. xxvii. p. 458. edit. 1558.

^e Eusebius mentions the contests, which prevailed in the Church, "*ἀρχιερωμένων ἀρχιερίων*" even before the reign of Constantine, Hist. Eccl. l. viii. c. 1.

G

session

feſſion of Chriſtianity was indeed extended. The converſion of many nations was begun long after the Chriſtian eſtabliſhment by Conſtantine. Among many nations alſo, which had before partially profeſſed the Chriſtian Faith, much was done to render the profeſſion of it univerſal. But, the fountains from which Chriſtianity flowed being corrupt, we cannot wonder if the doctrines, which were propagated under its authority, ſhould henceforth be impure. Beſides a deficiency in enforcing moral duties, even religious doctrines were perverted and made matter of party violence. ^f Hereſies of the moſt pernicious tendency were propagated with cruel perſecutions of the contrary Faith; while on the other hand ^g little differences of opinion were at length conſtrued into damnable hereſies.

This ſpirit of contention in the rulers of the Church found no ſmall encouragement

^f Arianism was enforced in this manner under Conſtantius, Valens, &c. And, as Bp. Sherlock obſerves, the great Arian controverſy yielded as ſevere trials to Chriſtians as they had ever before experienced. Sermons, vol. iii. p. 358.

See on this ſubject Sozomen, Hiſt. Eccl. l. vi. c. 18. and Socrates, l. iv. c. 16.

^g See the objections urged by Michael Cerularius againſt the Latin Church, Moſh. vol. ii. p. 556.

and

and support in the learning of the times. It hath been ^b before remarked that many philosophers were found among the early converts to Christianity. More succeeded them in subsequent ages. In the doctrine of the Trinity, and in the doctrines of Revelation which relate to the fall of man and the operation of evil spirits, these philosophers found a ¹ resemblance to the tenets of their respective schools. When therefore they embraced Christianity, they did not think it necessary to relinquish the ^a language of their former tenets; if indeed they relinquished ¹ all the tenets themselves. From a studiousness to reconcile such language with their new Religion much curious and ty-

^b See the preceding sermon.

¹ Philo, an Hellenistic Jew of Alexandria, who lived at the same time with the Apostles and who is said by some to have been an apostate Christian, prepared the way, by his ingenious but fanciful combinations of the Jewish Scriptures with the Platonic philosophy, for similar corruptions of Christianity. Photius says, that he was the writer “*ἐξ ἧ καὶ πᾶς ὁ ἀλληγορικός τῆς γραφῆς ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ λόγος ἔχει ἀρχὴν ἱερουργεῖται.*”

See the part of Photius prefixed to the Paris Edit. of Philo.

See also what Bishop Bull says of Philo: English Works, vol. iii. p. 1126, 8vo.

^a Bishop Horsley's Tracts, 8vo. 1789. p. 68.

¹ See what Bishop Warburton says on this subject in the introduction to his “Julian,” where he deduces the corruptions of our Religion in the dark ages “from the adulterate ornaments which the successors of the Apostolic fathers brought from the brothels of philosophy to adorn the sanctity of Religion,” p. 24—34.

pical reasoning was introduced. This reasoning at first served to shelter the prejudices of individuals. It was afterwards regarded as a creditable display of ^m literary attainments. And, as it had been adopted by men of known ⁿ attachment to Christianity, it was generally thought to detract nothing from the Christian character. This made way for more extensive ^o accommodations of our Religion to human

^m Clemens Alexandrinus composed his "Stromata" from the Scriptures and Heathen writers. His own words with regard to his work are very remarkable: "περιέξουσιν οἱ Στρωματεῖς ἀνα-
 "μεμιγμένην τὴν ἀληθειαν τοῖς φιλοσοφίας δόγμασι· πολλὰν εὐκεία-
 "λυμένην καὶ ἐπικερυμμένην, καθάπερ τῷ λεπτῷ τοῦ ἐδωλίου τῷ κα-
 "ρῷ," I. I. C. I.

Tertullian says, "Ipse denique hæreses a philosophia subor-
 "nantur:" and again at the conclusion of the same chapter,
 "viderint qui Stoicum et Platicum, et Dialecticum Chris-
 "tianismum protulerint." Adv. Hær. c. 7.

In what manner the philosophers of the early ages studied Christianity may be inferred also from what Cave says of them at the Nicene Council, "ad hunc conventum venisse quos-
 "dam philosophos sive dialecticos de rebus theologicis subtili-
 "ter disputaturos." Hist. Liter. vol. i. p. 351.

ⁿ Such as Clemens Alexandrinus. Cyprian himself was so fond of mystical interpretation, that Cave calls it "the argu-
 "ment which that good man produces as his warrant to knock
 "down a controversy, when other arguments were too weak to
 "do it." Prim. Christ. vol. i. p. 350.

And even Ammonius, the master of Origen, is said to have lived and died a Christian. Stillingfleet's Orig. Sac. p. 501.

^o The Gnostic sect, which began in the days of the Apostles, was extended in the second century by Basilides. He (as Mosheim says, vol. i. p. 223.) has generally obtained the first place among the Egyptian Gnostics: and is called by Cave

"Gnosticorum

systems, and for such explanations of its particular doctrines, as before its civil establishment had blended almost every tenet of it with the reveries of philosophical speculatists. After its civil establishment these subjects of abuse went on to increase. Philosophical Divinity was

"Gnosticorum antesignanus" (Hist. Lit. vol. i. p. 49.) He was followed by Valentine, Theodotus the tanner, and many others; among whom Manes "was so adventurous" (to use the words of Mosheim) "as to attempt a coalition of the doctrine of the Magi with the Christian system or the explication of the one by the other." Vol. i. p. 296.

Nor did Origen, who was the leader of the platonizing Christians, derive his speculations from a master, who had been less adventurous in the corruption of Christianity than Manes himself. See Mosheim, vol. i. p. 169—174. Under Origen the platonizing Christians soon eclipsed their Gnostic brethren.

"A prodigious number of interpreters both in the third century and in the following times pursued the method of Origen; nor could the few, who explained the Scriptures with judgment and a true spirit of criticism, oppose the torrent of Allegory which was overflowing the Church"—Origen illustrated the greatest part of the doctrines of Christianity, or to speak more properly disguised them "under the lines of a vain philosophy." Mosheim, vol. i. p. 278, 279.

Mosheim says of the fourth century: "Origen was the great model, whom the most eminent of the Christian doctors followed in their explications of the truths of the Gospel, which were of consequence explained according to the rules of the Platonic philosophy, as it was corrected and modelled by that learned father." Vol. i. p. 369.

Under this censure he includes Jerome, Hilary, Eusebius, Ephraim the Syrian, Chrysostom, Athanasius, and Didymus.

And so prevalent in these ages was the custom of disguising or secreting the doctrines of Christianity that Cave tells us, Chrysostom, in speaking of the mysterious parts of our Religion, uses the words "ισασι οι μεμνημενοι" at least fifty times in his

enlarged : and the study of philosophy, which was necessary before this Divinity could be understood, was for that reason thought essential to Christianity. And though the Platonic system, which it had been the successful aim of ages to incorporate with Christianity and which had obscured the philosophy adopted by the Gnostics, was discredited by the condemnation of some of its principal advocates and was at length abolished by Justinian ; yet it only made way for the Aristotelic, a philosophy better calculated to promote and regulate theological disputations. The effects of the intermixture of philosophy with Christianity were not easily to be done away. Men had not merely availed themselves of the assistance of human science in the explication of Christianity ; they had confounded both together, and had produced a jargon of philosophical Divinity which tended irresistibly to destroy all distinct

writings. Prim. Christ. vol. i. p. 213. See also on this subject Bingham's Antiquities, b. x. c. 5. sect. 8.

In the following ages the most learned commentators did in general nothing more than transcribe the Divinity of their predecessors. " The greater part of them reasoned and disputed " concerning the truths of the Gospel, as the blind would argue " about light and colours," &c. Mosh. vol. ii. p. 128. Accounts of them may be seen in different parts of Mosheim's second and third Volumes. See also Jortin's Remarks, vol. v. p. 152.

ideas

ideas of each considered as a separate and independent study. Their minds had been called off from a simple consideration of the doctrines of Revelation : and, however their system might be diverted from ¹ Plato to Aristotle, and from Aristotle to St. ² Augustine, to Peter ³ Lombard, or to any other father or doctor of the Church ; their attention was with difficulty afterwards to be attached to the holy Scriptures, and to the pure Religion which they teach. This certainly was an essential cause of those faults, which may be discovered in the venerable writings of the uninspired professors of our Religion in its early ages, and of the various heresies and general corruption of Christianity from the days of Ammonius and his scholar Origen down to that scholastic Theology, whose jargon did so much mischief in the Church during the latter part of

¹ As late as the middle of the 15th century there was a contest whether the doctrines of Plato or Aristotle should be preferred : and Jortin says, " I much fear it would be doing no wrong to the literati of those days to suppose they had no other esoteric Religion, than what they drew from Plato or Aristotle." Rem. vol. v. p. 490.

² Mosh. Eccl. Hist. vol. ii. p. 424.

³ Dean Tucker in his letters to Dr. Kippis says, " it is an undoubted fact that Peter Lombard's *summa sententiarum* was in such high vogue for several ages, as to eclipse the Scriptures themselves." P. 81.

the dark ages. The professors of Christianity ' forsook the living fountains, and hewed out for themselves cisterns which could hold no water. Had they consulted the Scriptures instead of the expositions of philosophers and the " perplexed reasonings of prejudiced men ; it would have been impossible that the doc-

' In the prolegomena to Cave's Hist. Lit. p. 2, we are informed " Sacrarum Scripturarum studium contemptui habitum, " neglectum, et in lingua vulgari prohibitum. Biblia sacra " raro visa, rarius tractata, adeo ut semel iterumque testatur " Erasmus se producere posse qui annum egressi octogesium " tantum ætatis in hujusmodi tricis (scilicet Theologia scholasti- " ca) perdiderint, nec unquam contextum evangelicum evol- " verint: idque se propria experientia quin et ipsis etiam fa- " tentibus comperisse."

Stafford of Pembroke Hall in Cambridge is said in 1524 to have been the first, who publicly read lectures out of the Scriptures, whereas before they read only the sentences. Strype's Memorials, vol. i. p. 48. Consistently with this Erasmus says, " Ante annos ferme triginta nihil tradebatur in schola " Cantabrigiensi præter Alexandrum, parva logicalia (ut " vocant) et vetera illa Aristotelis dictata, Scoticasque quæstio- " nes."—Jortin's Life of Erasmus, p. 49, 50.

What books were at length used in common life instead of the Scriptures may be inferred from hence. " Englishmen" (we are told in No. 47. of the collection of records, vol. ii. Collier's Eccl. Hist.) " have in their hands the holy Bible " and the New Testament in the Mother Tongue instead of the " old fabulous and phantastical books of the Table Round, " Launcelot de Lake, Huou de Bourdeaux, Besy of Hampton, " Guy of Warwick, and other such; whose impure filth and " vain fabulosity the light of God has abolished."

" Peter Abelard and his followers in the 12th century explained nothing, but obscured the clearest truths by distinctions and subdivisions. Jortin's Rem. vol. v. p. 262.

trines,

trines, which engaged the study of their lives, should have formed any part of their creed. But the men of authority in the Church (as I have above remarked) were contending for worldly preeminence, and in a manner which was not to be defended upon Gospel-principles. It ought not therefore to be matter of wonder that they should rather * avail themselves of the learning of the times, than recall men of learning to the study of genuine Christianity: it ought not to be matter of wonder that they should not command philosophers to bring their discordant opinions to the test of infallible truth. On the contrary, it was certainly part of the artifice of the Romish Church to * prohibit the use of the Scriptures

* Theophilus, Bishop of Alexandria, consecrated Synesius, a learned Platonic philosopher, Bishop of Ptolemais; though he declined the Bishoprick, declaring that he was a Platonist, and could not receive some of the doctrines of Christianity. Jortin's Rem. vol. iv. p. 243, 244.

* See in "Stillingfleet's council of Trent examined and disproved," an account of the steps by which the use of the Scriptures in the vulgar tongue was denied to the people. Having been partially restrained by particular Popes it was publicly forbidden by the Lateran council under Innocent the third, and at length finally and solemnly prohibited by the council of Trent, p. 51—58. And though Pius the Fourth afterwards permitted the use of the Scriptures in the vulgar tongue; yet this permission was soon recalled by Pope Clement the Eighth. See the preface to King James's Bible, p. 3.

in

in the vulgar tongue and the ordinary exposition of them ; a fatal artifice, in which, as well as in many others, it was equalled by the ⁷ Greek Communion, which taught that the Patriarch of Constantinople and his brethren were alone authorised to explain the declarations of Scripture.

Human learning suffered little less in the end from this confusion of sacred and profane knowledge, than the study of the Scriptures. Before the expiration of the fourth century it was decreed in a public ⁸ council that Bishops were not to read the books of Heathen writers. In the sixth century the teaching of philosophy at Athens was abolished by Justinian. And in process of time the purest Greek and Latin Classics were erased to furnish materials for transcribing legendary tales, made up of the most incongruous mixture of sacred and profane speculations ; till at length it was maintained that polite ⁹ literature ought to be stig-

⁷ Mosheim's Eccl. Hist. vol. iv. p. 249.

⁸ The 16th canon of the 4th council of Carthage, held in the year 398, decrees, "Episcopus gentilium libros non legat."

⁹ Erasmus says, "Lovanii quidam non semel publicitus
"dixit apud populum linguas et politiores literas esse fontem
"omnium hæreseôn, et ob id earum professores sustibus ejicien-
"dos ex academia;" and adds what is well worthy of our
notice,

matized, and banished, as the fountain of all heresy.

To these internal causes of ignorance and corruption, which, though not universal, were at least general in their operation, if we add the accumulated weight of all those ^b foreign invasions, general conquests, and general importations of savage laws and savage manners; which rendered the times, of which I am speaking, the most unfortunate period of human existence; we shall not be surprised at finding that the means of mental improvement were at length so extensively destroyed, as to leave several different monasteries or schools of learning in possession of no more than ^c two

notice, “et tamen inter illos nullus erat qui vel hisceret
“adversus Ecclesiæ decreta.” Vol. ix. p. 531. Lugd. Bat.
1706.

^b Of the Goths, Vandals, and other barbarous conquerors Burnet declares, “These new conquerors being rude, and ignorant, and wholly given to sensible things; and learning being
“universally extinguished; gross superstitions took place.”—
Hist. of Ref. vol. ii. p. 63.

And Jortin says, that “an effect of the government of the
“barbarians in the West was that the Bishops and the Clergy
“became hunters and fighters.” Remarks, vol. v. p. 98.

^c See the second dissertation prefixed by Warton to his History of English Poetry. In it he says, that “one single copy of
“the Bible, St. Jerome’s Epistles, and some volumes of
“Ecclesiastical history and martyrology often served several
“different monasteries.”

The

or three books for their common use ; and we shall easily be able to account for the worst evils of these times, and for the want of success which attended all the well-meant exertions that were made to disperse the impending cloud of ignorance and superstition.

These observations, joined to others on what may be considered as the effects of such a general state of the Christian world ;—on the rise and establishment of the pretensions of the Romish Church, of which we formed a dependent part, and which conspicuously preserved and transmitted the regular profession, while it corrupted in many instances the purity, of Christianity ;—on the Eastern Church, which was separated through these pretensions from western Christendom and the influence of this separation on both communions ;—and on as much besides of the internal and external state of the Church, as is contained within a short view both of the doctrines of our Religion which it particularly defended or corrupted, and of the opposition which it encountered from foreign enemies ; may perhaps

The libraries of the religious houses in Syria are at present of nearly the same extent.

Volney's Travels, vol. ii. p. 448. Engl. Edit.

* By Alfred, Charlemagne, William the Conqueror, &c.

give

give us an imperfect sketch of the religious history of this period : they certainly will contribute to free pure Christianity from censure, and enable us to give an answer to every man that asketh us a reason of the Hope that is in us ; as far as this Hope is connected with the part of religious history under our present consideration.

That enormous aggregate of power, which was possessed by the Bishops of Rome in the times immediately preceding the reformation, was the effect in a great degree of the causes above stated : but it was not the production of a single age, nor indeed the entire production of the ages which succeeded the time of Constantine. It founded its presumptuous claims on the authority which St Peter was supposed to possess and to transmit to his successors. Whatever be the meaning of the * words, which our Saviour addressed to St. Peter when this Apostle confessed that he was the Son of God ; as they proceeded from one who had declared that his Kingdom was not of this world, they could not mean to confer temporal power upon the Apostle : nor is it

* Matt. xvi. 18.

probable

probable that they were designed to confer any spiritual superiority, much less any assurance of infallibility upon him. Our blessed Saviour, as if to caution his Disciples beforehand against the evils which would arise from disputes among the future rulers of his Church “who “should be greatest,” expressly ‘forbad such ambition among them; declaring that he who desired to be first should be last of all, and recommending to their imitation the unassuming simplicity of a little child. It is therefore exceedingly improbable, if not impossible, that he should set up one of his Disciples to be the spiritual head of all the others. He himself was to be the spiritual ^s Master to whom they were to look: and the Holy Ghost was to compensate for the want of his immediate and personal appearance by extraordinary gifts in the first ages, and by the inspired writings which were an effect of those gifts and were to supply their place in future times. Consistently with this, St. Peter appears to have had no precedence in the council of the Apostles at Jerusalem. St. Paul also declares of himself that ^b “in nothing was he behind the very

^f Mark ix. 34, &c.

^s Matt. xxiii. 8.

^b 2 Cor. xii. 11.

Again when St. Paul mentions (Gal. ii. 9.) James, Cephas,
and

“chiefeſt Apoſtles :” and he withſtood St. Peter to the face for a reaſon which deſtroys every idea of his infallibility, ¹ “because he was to be “blamed.” Beſides, St. Paul had the Goſpel of the ^k uncircumciſion committed to him in the ſame manner as that of the circumciſion was to St. Peter : and both he and the other Apoſtles appear at all times to act independently of every other ſpiritual head than Chriſt. But of whatever nature St. Peter’s authority and preeminence might be ; they ought in reality to confer nothing of either on the Biſhops of Rome. ¹ “It is doubtful whether St. Peter “ever was at Rome ; but that he fixed his “chair there is a very idle and groundleſs imagination.” Euſebius indeed ſays that St. Peter came to Rome in the days of Claudius :

and John, who ſeemed to be pillars, he makes no diſtinction in favour of Cephas (or Peter) nor does he mention him before the others.

ⁱ Gal. ii. 11.

^k Gal. ii. 7.

¹ Bp. Bull’s Vindication of the Church of England, 8vo. p. 139.

Archbiſhop Cranmer alſo ſays it was not certain that St. Peter ever was at Rome. Burnet’s Hiſt. of the Reformation, vol. i. p. 175.

Stillingfleet in his Orig. Britan. ſpeaks nearly to the ſame effect, concluding at length with an approbation of Laſtantiuſ’s opinion that St. Peter certainly did not come to Rome till the reign of Nero nor long before his martyrdom, p. 45 —48.

but

but he ^m seems to have received this from the authority of Papias, who was a credulous writer. However in process of time, as the dignity no less than the opulence of cities attaches itself to the persons of those who fill important stations in them; and as the Church of Rome was the ⁿ only Western Church which aspired to the credit of Apostolical foundation; the Bishops of Rome began to be regarded with peculiar respect and a ^o titular kind of preeminence was tacitly allowed them. St. Peter also, once presumed to have been the first Bishop of that See, was admitted in succeeding times to have been so without contradiction. And

^m Bp. Bull's vindication of the Church of England, p. 139. See concerning the credulity of Papias, Euseb. Hist. Eccl. l. iii. c. 39.

ⁿ See Waterland's Lady Moyer's Sermons, p. 326.

^o Mosheim's Eccl. Hist. vol. i. p. 264. That this preeminence was only titular may be inferred from hence: it was declared by the general council at Nice, that "the Patriarchs of Alexandria and Antioch had the same authority over the countries round them, that he of Rome had over those that lay about that city." Burnet's Hist. of the Ref. vol. i. p. 138. And this titular preeminence the Greeks were to the last disposed to admit, viz. "Papam ordine, non dignitate præcedere." Cave's Hist. Lit. vol. ii. Sæc. Synod. p. 234.

T. Smith also in his account of the Greek Church admits (p. 2.) a priority of Dignity in the See of Rome; though he asserts (p. 80.) the perfect equality of the Patriarch of Constantinople with the Pope.

as appeals were made in civil matters from different parts of the Empire to the Imperial city ; so they were also made in matters respecting Christianity. Probably too these latter may be traced more frequently in the early ages ; because, notwithstanding the corrupt state of the Romish Church in subsequent times, it is notorious that she was ^p singularly free from the early heresies. The supposed successors of St. Peter soon availed themselves of the power, which these proofs of respect appeared to acknowledge in them ; and proceeded to issue directions and menaces to distant parts of the Christian world. These interpositions were by no means received with approbation or with silent acquiescence. As early as in the second century they excited the resentment and censure ^q both of Irenæus and

^p Sozomen, Hist. Eccl. l. iii. c. 6, and 13. and l. vi. c. 23. Reading's Edit.

Stillingfleet's Orig. Britan. p. 226.

Waterland's Lady Moyer's Sermons, p. 327.

^q Εἰρηναῖος ὁ Λυγδυνὸς τῆς ἐν Γαλλίᾳ ἐπισκοπὸς τῷ Βικτόρῳ δι' ἐπιστολῆς γενναίως κατεδραμὲν, μὲμφαμένους αὐτῇ τὴν θερμότητά, κ. τ. λ. Socrates, Hist. Eccl. l. v. c. 22. Reading's Edit.

Polycrates expressed a similar disapprobation of the conduct of the Bishop of Rome, and on the same occasion. Heylyn's Reform. justified, p. 270.

Polycrates. And in the third century * Cyprian opposed with great resolution the incroachments of the Bishops of Rome; refusing as Bishop of Carthage to defend himself in answer to an appeal which had been received at Rome against him; and declaring that all Bishops were equal in power. But remonstrances, and repeated decrees of early * councils, were not sufficient to counteract a power which was sure of being supported by the passions and interests of mankind. Even Atha-

* Cyprian says on the subject, “ Statutum sit omnibus nobis
“ et æquum sit pariter ac justum, ut unius cujusque causa illic
“ audiatur ubi est crimen admissum; et singulis pastoribus por-
“ tio gregis sit adscripta, quam regat unusquisque et gubernet,
“ rationem sui actus Domino redditurus: oportet utique eos
“ quibus præsumus non circumcursare nec episcoporum concor-
“ diam cohærentem sua subdola et fallaci temeritate collidere,
“ sed agere illic causam suam, ubi et accusatores habere et testes
“ sui criminis possent.” Epist. 55. Edit. Paris. 1726. p. 86.

And again he says, “ habet in ecclesiæ administratione vo-
“ luntatis suæ arbitrium liberum unusquisque præpositus, ratio-
“ nem actus sui Domino redditurus.” Epist. 72. p. 129. ad finem.

Hence Jortin says of St. Cyprian, “ if his authority be any
“ thing, the Pope’s authority is nothing: he hath cut it up from
“ the root by establishing the parity of Bishops.” 2d Charge, Sermons, vol. vii. p. 394.

* Of the second general council and that at Milevis—See Burnet’s Hist. vol. i. p. 138—9. Collier’s Eccl. Hist. vol. i. p. 27 and 128. Cave’s Hist. Lit. vol. i. p. 560. and Bingham’s Antiquities, b. ix. c. 1. sect. 13.

nafius,

nafrus, when obliged to leave Alexandria, ' retired to Rome and contributed to aggrandize the Bishop of that See by appealing to him. Indeed it may be remarked of both the " Eastern and the " African Clergy, that, whenever they were unable to support either themselves or their doctrines, they were always forward to appeal to the Roman Pontiff. Besides, after the civil establishment of Christianity the Bishops of Rome had not only the " Imperial sanction for their titular preeminence, and a full share of the legal " power which the Church now derived from the state ; they had also the most favourable op-

' Sozomen says in his Eccl. Hist. " αφικομενοι δε ως αὐτῆς
 " Ἀθανασίου φιλοφρονῶς ἐδιξάντο καὶ πρὸς αὐτῆς τῇ κατ' αὐτοὺς ἰδίᾳ
 " δικῇ." l. iii. c. 7. See also Socrates, Hist. Eccl. l. ii. c. 11.

" Socrates, Hist. Eccl. l. iv. c. 12.

" See a claim addressed in the 5th century to the African Clergy by a Bishop of Rome, in which he asserts his Right thus to receive appeals and to decide on all occasions. Cave's Hist. Lit. vol. i. p. 394.

" Mosheim, vol. i. p. 351.

" One of the branches of this legal power, which contributed exceedingly in future ages to the temporal preeminence of the Clergy, was the right which Constantine gave persons, contending in law, to remove their causes out of the civil courts and to appeal to the judgment of the Bishops ; whose sentence in this case was to have the same authority as if it had been decreed by the Emperour himself. Sozomen, Hist. Eccl. l. i. c. 9. See some account of the subsequent effects of this concession in Father Paul's Hist. of the Council of Trent, translated by Brent, p. 312, 313.

portunity of increasing this power by the removal of the residence of the Emperours to the Eastern parts of their Dominions. The Papal encroachments found likewise from time to time protection in the disordered state of the Western world arising from the inundation of Barbarians; and precedent in the example of unlimited power conferred by the Celtic Barbarians on their ^z Arch-Druid. They had moreover not only ecclesiastical pretensions for their support: these, through the favours which they conferred by absolving the consciences of guilty Princes and by assisting them with anathemas against their enemies, procured in the eighth century for the Bishoprick of Rome large ^a donations of land, and raised it to the substantial power of a temporal Sovereignty.

During the progress of these circumstances, who can wonder that the Roman Pontiffs should assert their superiority to the civil power by withholding from the Emperour the usual tribute at their ^b election, and afterwards by ^c disclaiming all dependance upon his au-

^z Jortin's Rem. vol. iv. p. 441.

^a From Pepin.

^b This was done by Agatho in the 7th century.

^c This happened in the eighth century under the Popedom of Gregory the second and third. Mosh. vol. ii. p. 262—3.

thority:

thority : or that these Pontiffs, having laid the foundation for a separation between the Eastern and Western Churches by ^d excommunicating the Bishop of Constantinople, should both actually ^e pronounce this separation when the Eastern Christians refused to join with them in the worship of images, and finally consummate the unhappy breach by new and unrecalled anathemas as soon as their usurped dominion was endangered by the interference of the Greek Patriarch in ^f parts of the Latin communion ?

In the mean time also the watchful policy of the Romish Church failed not to grasp at all the different means, both internal and external, which offered themselves to secure the power that she claimed and to impose its decisions upon the Christian world. As if the general influence over the Western Church, which the Bishops of it had imperceptibly

^d Felix Bishop of Rome excommunicated Acacius Bishop of Constantinople about the end of the fifth century.

^e See Mosh. vol. ii. p. 262—3.

^f In Illyricum, Macedonia, Epirus, Achaia, Thessaly, and Sicily : and about the year 862. Mosh. vol. ii. p. 352.

Cave calls it the *controversia Bulgariana*, and says of it—
 “*Quantas turbas excitaverit controversia hæc Bulgariana historiarum hujus sæculi (scil. noni) non prorsus ignaris satis constat.*
 “*Hinc rupta deinceps penitus concordia, natumque schisma*
 “*nullo forte sæculo extinguendum.*” Hist. Liter. vol. ii. p. 2.

given to the See of Rome, was not a sufficient support for the Papal Dominion ; no sooner had the successors of those ^a pious Monks, who in times of persecution had fled from the habitations of society or who in future times had withdrawn through erroneous notions of Christianity to a life of mortification, made themselves considerable by their numbers, their possessions, and the acquisition of all the learning of their times ; than the Church of Rome immediately ^b detached them from the jurisdiction of their respective Prelates, and formed them into independent communities which were every where to obey the orders and enforce the authority of the supreme Pontiff. But this was a less injurious device for the establishment of Papal power, than presents itself to us in the fatal ⁱ restraints imposed with regard to the use of the Scriptures in the common language ; and in the dispensations and indulgences ; no less than the ^k excom-

^a See what is said concerning the Monks of Egypt by Eusebius, Hist. Eccl. l. ii. c. 17.

See also Bingham's Antiquities, b. viii. c. 1. sect. 4.

^b This happened in the seventh century, as Mosheim says, vol. ii. p. 172. See concerning it Collier's Eccl. Hist. vol. i. p. 388. And, concerning the original subjection of Monks to the Bishops of their own diocese, see Bingham's Antiquities, b. ii. c. 4. sect. 2. and b. vii. c. 3. sect. 17.

ⁱ See note ^a, page 89.

^k It was a prevailing opinion that he who was excommunicated

munications, penances, holy wars, and 'persecutions, which proceeding in the end to the most horrid extravagance diffused lasting impiety, immorality, and cruelty through all the different orders of society. But indeed what less was to be expected from the continued and almost uninterrupted advances, which the Papal power had for many ages been making ; and from the profligacy of the Bishops by whom it was finally established ? The Prelates, who filled the Apostolical chair about the ninth and tenth centuries, have furnished the enemies of Christianity, no less than the enemies of the abuses of it, with inexhaustible matter of in-
vective. They seem to have been permitted by Providence to prove the extreme folly, as well as blasphemy, of those pretensions to

nicated forfeited all the rights not only of a citizen, but also of an human creature. Jortin's 3d charge, Sermons, vol. vii. p. 417.

¹ Burnet says, "The first instance of severity on men's "bodies, which was not censured by the Church, was in the "fifth" (rather the sixth) "century under Justin the first, who "ordered the tongue of Severus (who had been Patriarch of "Antioch, but did daily anathematise the Council of Chalce-
"don) to be cut out:"—And that it was not before the twelfth and thirteenth centuries that such cruelties were raised to their utmost extravagance by being inflicted on numbers of simple and innocent persons.

Hist. of the Ref. vol. i. p. 24.

As late as in the sixteenth century the Pope wished to introduce the inquisition into every country of Christendom, Burnet's Hist. vol. ii. p. 347.

H 4

infalli-

infallibility which have been made for the Bishops of that See. “There was a^m succession
 “(says Stillingfleet) of not less than fifty Bi-
 “shops so remarkable for their wickedness
 “that Annas and Caiaphas (setting only aside
 “their condemning Christ) were saints in com-
 “parison of them.” It must be confessed how-
 ever, that among the Bishops of Rome after the
 commencement of the eleventh century there
 were many, who were distinguished by their zeal
 for the recovery of the discipline of the Church
 and the honour of the holy See. But such
 was the ultimate tendency of their zeal, that
 we may almost join with thoseⁿ writers, who
 pronounce their virtues to have been more
 detrimental to mankind than the vices of their
 predecessors. They appear to have taken it
 for granted, that whatever authority had been
 either exercised or claimed by their predecessors
 belonged of right to their Church. And ef-
 fectual means had been left them to persuade
 superstitious and illiterate ages of the justice of

^m Sermon 1st, vol. ii. 8vo. p. 49. Edit. 1697.

Jortin says of this period, “The Prelates and Clergy were
 “in general as ignorant and profligate as can well be conceived:
 “and the Popes were not men but devils.” Rem. vol. v.
 p. 13.

ⁿ Jortin: 3d Charge, Sermons, vol. vii. p. 421. Mr.
 Gibbon, &c.

their

their pretensions by the * forgeries, which had been contrived to sanction all their temporal and spiritual claims and which were actually received for many ages as genuine productions. And though Gregory the Seventh may be considered as having carried the Papal power to its height, and as having substantiated in the eleventh century the Papal † right of interfering and deciding universally in both civil and religious concerns; yet Papal insolence seems to have extended itself under its successors in the ‡ following centuries, and was not carried to its extreme height till the Pope was explicitly declared to be superior to general councils, and his infallibility was § publicly proposed and ac-

* The forgeries of the donation of Constantine and the decretals of Isidorus.

Cardinal Cusanus himself says of the former, “ reperi in ipsa scriptura manifesta argumenta conscriptionis et falsitatis.”

Jewell's Works, p. 369.

The latter were supposed to contain the decrees of sixty Bishops from Clement to Siricius. Blondel has most fully proved the forgery of them and it is confessed by Steph. Baluzius—Cave's Hist. Lit. vol. ii. p. 21. It is even confessed by Baronius, Annal. ad an. 865.

These forgeries however were not fully detected before the Reformation.

† Mosheim gives some account of the Dictatus Hildebrandini, or what may be supposed to have been Gregory's principles of Papal Government, vol. ii. p. 491.

‡ Particularly in the thirteenth century under Innocent the Third, &c.

§ See the arguments advanced on this subject by Laynez, General of the Jesuits, and supported by the other advocates for

knowledge in the sixteenth century. It would be easy to add more observations on the conduct of particular Bishops of Rome, by which the Papal power was established : but the truth with regard to those Bishops is, that all of them laboured to extend their jurisdiction and uniformly carried on the same scheme. One

for the Papal pretensions: Father Paul's Hist. of the Council of Trent, p. 570—5. See also Bp. Jewell's Epist. de Concil. Trident. §. 25.

It may be thought strange that this offensive claim should be made at a time when the Papacy was so rudely attacked by the reformers: but the Church of Rome acted about this time in the same imprudent manner with regard also to its other claims. "In the year 1534, Pope Clement the 7th was not ashamed to grant to his nephew Hippolitus Cardinal de Medicis all the benefices of the world, secular and regular, dignities and personages, simple and with cure, being vacant, for six months to begin from the first day of his possession, with power to dispose of and convert to his use all the fruits"—Father Paul's Hist. p. 235. And in 1556 the Pope declared "he would change Kingdoms at his pleasure, that he had made Ireland a Kingdom, that all Princes were under his feet, and that he would allow no Prince to be his companion, nor to be too familiar with him." Burnet's Hist. vol. ii. p. 342—3. Indeed Bp. Jewell states, that the proportion, asserted about this time to subsist between the Emperour's and the Pope's power, was as one to seventy seven. Jewell's Apology for the Church of England, p. 73, and elsewhere.

And, to complete the whole, Cardinal Bellarmine asserts that the only reason why the early Christians did not depose Nero, Dioclesian, and Julian, was because they wanted means to effect it. This is mentioned and well refuted by Cave in his "Primitive Christianity," vol. ii. p. 349—351.

encroach-

'encroachment followed another; till at length, aided by the circumstances above mentioned and various others, they were enabled to oppress all Western Christendom, and to crush for many ages every attempt to revive a spirit of moderation in the rulers of the Church, and the true knowledge and practice of Christianity among its different members. The corruption and ignorance, which ensued, were in the end such, that, as we are told, "the world was possessed with a conceit that there was a trick for saving souls besides that plain method, which Christ had taught; and that the Priests had the secret of it in their hands."

Whatever friendly agreement there might be between the Bishops of Rome and other Bishops in the commencement of their power; no agreement could at length be maintained with the Romish Church, except by submission. And various reasons contributed to hinder this in the Clergy of the East. The want of just foundation in the Papal power could not be unknown to the Patriarchs of Constantinople: and these Patriarchs were not the less

* See Jortin's Rem. vol. v. p. 349.

† Burnet's Hist. vol. ii. p. 74.

strenuous

strenuous to " retort the anathemas, by which they were separated from the Romish communion, and to defend their own power, because (as is " remarked of them) they were singularly tolerant in the exercise of it. The vicinity of the Imperial court also, which hindered the Bishops of Constantinople from acquiring civil power, contributed in no small degree to protect them against the arbitrary encroachments of other Churches. Besides, the " splendour itself of this court created in all, who lived within its influence and protection, such a pride, as was little inferior to that of the Romish Church and would submit to the dictates of no foreign Ecclesiastic. There was moreover a fixed contempt, with which the Greeks affected to treat their less learned brethren of the West, which irresistibly prevented their submission in matters of religious controversy. The Greek Clergy, though involved in nearly a common " ignorance of true

" This was done by Acacius, Photius, and Michael Cerularius. Mosh. vol. ii. p. 84, 351, 555.

" Socrates, Hist. Eccl. l. vii. c. 11.

" The account which may be collected from Chrysostom's works of this splendour almost exceeds belief.

" The Greeks and Latins seem to have agreed in the darker ages that the essence and life of Religion consisted in image-worship,

Christianity with the whole Christian world, were certainly more learned in other respects and more grave than those of the Latin communion. Some few indeed of the dignified Clergy among the Latins were in no respect inferior to the most celebrated of the Greeks; but these Latins surpassed the other members of the Western Church ^a beyond all comparison. The prejudices, arising in the minds of the Greeks from all these circumstances, made them amidst their distress repeatedly resist the solicitations of ^a those among their Emperours, who wished to purchase the assistance of the Franks by the dependence of their Church: and joined to other prejudices, excited by the oppressive ^b Reign of the Latins in Constantinople and by mutual persecution, made them to the very last, even in the extremity of their

worship, in honouring dead saints, in collecting relics, in enriching the Church, and other such exertions of piety.

Mosheim, vol. ii. p. 417.

And Jortin calls the Bishops at the second council of Nice, who reestablished image-worship in the East in the 8th century, "the most lying and senseless blockheads upon the face of the earth." Rem. vol. iv. p. 466.

^a This was remarkably true in England in the 13th and 14th centuries. See the second dissertation prefixed to Warton's History of English Poetry.

^a This happened both to Michael and John Palæologus.

^b For the sixty years, during which the Crusaders kept possession of Constantinople.

siege

siege, disdain to hear of succour which was to be obtained by submission to the Roman Pontiff.

The influence, which this situation of the two Communions must have had on their doctrines, is very obvious. I have before remarked that one pernicious consequence of disputes between the Rulers of the Church was the want of purity, which thenceforth prevailed throughout the Christian world. The pretensions of the Latin and Greek Churches, and the particular doctrines in

* The fatal consequences of this state of the Christian Church shewed themselves soon after the days of Constantine. The doctrines of Arianism, which prevailed at Constantinople under Constantius and some of his successors, were so powerfully impressed on Ulphilas, when he came thither on an embassy from the Goths, and were so successfully propagated by him among his countrymen; that the Arian heresy maintained itself much longer among them, and, through their means, among other Northern nations, than in any other communities. Theodoret in his Eccl. Hist. says of Ulphilas's conversion to Arianism, "Κατ' ἐκεῖνον δὲ τὸν χρόνον Οὐλφίλας αὐτῶν (Γότθων scilicet) ἐπισκοπὸς ἦν, ὃ μάλᾳ ἐπειθοῖτο, καὶ τῆς ἐκείνου λόγους ἀκινήτους ὑπελάμβανον νόμους· τῷ τῶν καὶ λόγοις κατακληθεὶς Εὐδοξίῳ καὶ χρημασίᾳ διελκασθεὶς πείσσει παρῆσκειναι τῆς βασιλεὺς τὴν βασιλείᾳ κοινωνίαν ἀσπασασθαι· ἐπεισε δὲ, φησας ἐκ φιλοτιμίας γεννησθαι τὴν εἰρήνην, δόγματων δὲ μηδεμίαν εἶναι διαφορὰν." L. iv. c. 37. Reading. See also Sozomen, Hist. Eccl. l. vi. c. 37.

Sozomen afterwards clearly asserts that Ulphilas was the great cause of the prevalence and continuance of Arianism among the nations of the North, Hist. Eccl. l. vii. c. 17. Where speaking of the divisions of the Arians he calls one of them that of the Goths, adding "Γότθων δὲ, καθότι καὶ
"Σιλβίας,

which they opposed each other whether important or not, were the subjects more earnestly inculcated among themselves and enforced on their converts and dependants, than the great and fundamental doctrines of Christianity. When therefore the northern ^d nations of Europe were converted by these Churches, they may be said not so much to have been converted to Christianity in general, as to the peculiar and distinguishing tenets of the Romish or Greek Communion: and this too, at the most degenerate period of both those Communions. No wonder then that the sword was the instrument, by which Christianity was propagated among many of these

“Σιλίας, ὁ τῶν ἐπισκοπῶν, ὁμοίως ἐδίδασκεν” ἐπακαλυφθέντες
 “δι τῶν χερῶν πάντες βαρβαροὶ συν αὐτοῖς ἐκκλησιαζόν” πειθητικοί
 “γὰρ εἰς τὰ μαλίστα τῇ Σιλίᾳ ἐτυγχάνον ὑποβραβεῖ τε γεινομένη καὶ
 “διαδοχῇ Οὐλφίλα, τῇ παρ’ αὐτοῖς ἐπισκοπήσαντος,” κ. τ. λ.

^d Bulgaria, Hungary, Bohemia, Saxony, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Poland, and Russia.

Mosheim charges Boniface the Apostle of the Germans with an excessive zeal for increasing the Honours and pretensions of the sacerdotal order and a profound ignorance of many things, of which the knowledge was absolutely necessary in an Apostle; and particularly of the true nature and genius of the Christian Religion, vol. ii. p. 207.

See also in Cave's Hist. Lit. a Letter from Joannes Smera Polovecius, giving an account of the corruptions of the Latin and Greek Churches; and addressed to the King of the Russians, when he and his Kingdom were converted to the Greek Church. Vol. ii. p. 113.

nations;

nations; and that this should finish in * Lithuania the conversion of northern Europe in the fourteenth century. However, though the contests between the Western and Eastern Christians were productive of many evils; they produced also some considerable good. They hindered all parties from corrupting the Scriptures through fear of detection. They kept alive some literary enquiries; and the spirit, with which they were carried on, powerfully urged the different disputants to exert at times their utmost abilities. Besides, the unsuccessful attempts, which were made to suppress these contentions and to effect an union of opinion among Christians that there might be an union of operation also among them against their common enemies, were productive of excellent consequences. The embassies sent by the Greek Emperours into the West, and their journeys thither at three different times, tended effectually to recall the attention of the Latins to † Greek literature; and, by disperf-

* This may be conceded to Mr. Gibbon, without giving him the least advantage over real Christianity. See his History, vol. v. p. 577.

† The Greek language had been exiled from Italy upwards of 700 years, when Emanuel Chrysoloras (who had been sent by John Palæologus Emperour of Constantinople to implore the assistance of the western Christians) set about the restoration
cf

ing among them the means of cultivating it, prepared the way for that Reformation which was to succeed and remedy the evils of this unhappy period.

The doctrines, which declare the internal state of the Church, and which were particularly defended or corrupted during the ages that fill up the long period from Constantine to the Reformation, consist either of those fundamental doctrines of our Religion, which respect the Trinity, the person and natures of our Saviour, and other important articles of the same kind which are received and professed by ourselves at present ; or of those corruptions of Christianity which became in subsequent times the subject of our Reformation. The former shew the effects of the degeneracy of the Christian world by the manner in which they were defended : the latter by their very nature and existence. The former had the advantage of being finally established in the earlier and less darkened part of this period. And certainly we have reason to bless God that they were then established ; whatever the

of it in that country. See Port Royal Greek Grammar, Pref. p. 9. and 12.

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Barnston Lectures

